Maintaining Theological Integrity in Preaching:

Hermeneutical Strategies for Avoiding Selective

Verses to Support Personal Agendas

by

Russell Tolentino

JD(W Aust), LLM(Edin), MLP, GDLP(ANU), MPH(Syd), MHLM, MGH(NSW),

PGDip(Oxf), BSc, MLS(ASCPi)MB, MLS(AMT), RMT

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Approved by: Dr Samuel Galloza

Supervisor

Abstract

Preaching is a foundational aspect of Christian worship, serving as a primary means of communicating biblical truths, shaping theological understanding, and fostering spiritual growth. However, the practice of selective verse usage—isolating specific texts from their broader context to support personal, institutional, or doctrinal agendas—poses a significant challenge to maintaining theological integrity. This phenomenon, often referred to as "cherry-picking", risks distorting the biblical message, leading to doctrinal incoherence, ethical compromises, and weakened trust within congregations.

This study, "Maintaining Theological Integrity in Preaching: Hermeneutical Strategies for Avoiding Selective Verses to Support Personal Agendas", explores this critical issue by examining the historical, theological, and practical dimensions of selective preaching while proposing strategies rooted in hermeneutical principles.

The research highlights the theological and pastoral risks associated with selective verse usage, including the promotion of exclusivist doctrines, as seen in sectarian groups like the Iglesia Ni Cristo (Church of Christ) (https://iglesianicristo.net/), and the ethical dilemmas arising from the misrepresentation of Scripture. By employing a qualitative methodology, this study integrates an extensive literature review, in-depth textual analysis of sermons, and detailed case studies to understand how selective verse usage manifests across different preaching contexts. These case studies provide concrete examples of how specific theological and hermeneutical approaches can undermine or uphold biblical interpretation's integrity.

The findings emphasise the importance of hermeneutical strategies that prioritise the historical, literary, and theological contexts of Scripture. Such strategies are essential for maintaining the coherence of biblical teachings and ensuring that sermons faithfully reflect the overall message of the text. Practical recommendations include adopting robust exegetical methods, integrating theological accountability structures, and promoting comprehensive theological education for preachers.

This study contributes significantly to the fields of biblical studies, homiletics, and pastoral theology by offering actionable insights for preachers, theological educators, and church leaders. It addresses gaps in existing research by providing a framework for responsible biblical interpretation and practical tools for mitigating the misuse of Scripture. Additionally, this research highlights the broader implications of selective preaching on congregational dynamics, including its impact on spiritual growth, critical engagement with Scripture, and community cohesion.

By advocating for a balanced and faithful approach to biblical interpretation, this study aims to restore trust in the preaching ministry, enhance the spiritual formation of congregations, and foster a more accurate and transformative engagement with the Word of God.

Dedication

This dissertation is a tribute to my beloved wife, Nel, for her unwavering love and support, my wonderful daughters, Yuri and Yela, for their endless inspiration, and my dear mother, Cora, for her steadfast encouragement.

Additionally, I dedicate this work to the devoted members of the Iglesia Ni Cristo, my former spiritual family. It is with utmost respect and heartfelt hope that this dissertation may serve as a meaningful contribution to your spiritual journey. Having walked the same path as you, I deeply understand the strength of your faith, the depth of your commitment, and the fervent desire to lead a life pleasing to God.

Through this study, I pray that you find the courage to seek truth, embrace Scripture with a heart open to its fullness, and cultivate a faith deeply rooted in grace, love, and the boundless hope in Christ. May this work inspire reflection, encourage dialogue, and ultimately draw you closer to God's Word's beauty and transformative power.

I sincerely wish that this dissertation, born from deep love and respect for the community I once called home, will illuminate paths to theological integrity and spiritual growth, fostering unity and a greater understanding of God's immeasurable love for His people.

With gratitude and prayers for your ongoing journey of faith,

Russell Tolentino

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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This study explores the essential role of preaching in Christian worship and emphasises the need for sound hermeneutical practices to uphold theological integrity. It investigates the risks associated with the selective use of biblical verses, which can distort the intended teachings of Scripture. This issue has been debated throughout church history and continues to influence modern preaching practices.

The study examines contemporary examples, such as the Iglesia Ni Cristo (INC), a religious sect established in the Philippines by Felix Y Manalo in November 1913 and subsequently registered to the Philippine Government on 27 July 1914, and proposes strategies to address selective preaching. It highlights the importance of rigorous hermeneutics, accountability, and ongoing theological education in promoting responsible and faithful preaching. The following sections thoroughly examine these themes, outlining the challenges and solutions related to maintaining theological integrity in preaching.

This study uses the Douay-Rheims version of the Bible for all verses cited unless stated otherwise.

1.1.1 The Role of Preaching in Christian Worship

Preaching is vital in Christian worship as a primary means of conveying theological insights, moral teachings, and practical guidance to the faith community. Its significance lies in its ability to connect biblical truths with the everyday experiences

of believers, providing both spiritual nourishment and ethical direction. Historically, preaching has been essential for educating and instructing Christian communities, fostering their growth in understanding and applying Scripture (Long, 2005). Early examples include the apostolic sermons found in the New Testament, where figures like Peter and Paul preached to diverse audiences, combining biblical exposition with pastoral application.

Effective preaching conveys theological knowledge and shapes congregations' beliefs and ethical behaviours. For instance, it helps believers internalise and live out biblical principles such as love, forgiveness, justice, and humility. In this way, preaching serves as a transformative force within the community, aligning individual lives with the church's wider mission. Additionally, preaching encourages spiritual growth by prompting deeper engagement with Scripture and challenging congregants to reflect on their faith amid contemporary issues (Snook, 2019). It can unite congregations around a shared understanding of their mission and purpose, reinforcing their identity as a community of believers.

However, the effectiveness of preaching mostly depends on the preacher's commitment to sound hermeneutical and theological practices. This includes a profound understanding of biblical texts, applying them faithfully to current contexts, and clearly articulating their relevance. Preaching that lacks hermeneutical rigour can undermine the credibility of both the preacher and the church, potentially leading to doctrinal confusion or ethical missteps (Chapell, 2005). Therefore, integrity in handling Scripture must be at the forefront of preaching to ensure the teachings presented are grounded in a faithful and holistic interpretation of the biblical text (Robinson, 2014).

Ultimately, preaching is not merely to inform but to transform lives according to God's revealed truth.

1.1.2 Hermeneutics as a Foundation for Preaching

Hermeneutics, the study of the principles and methods of interpretation, is essential for accurately understanding and applying biblical texts. It equips preachers with the tools to bridge the historical, cultural, and linguistic gaps between the biblical world and contemporary audiences. The hermeneutical process involves engaging with Scripture on multiple levels—historical, literary, and theological—ensuring that interpretations remain true to the text's intended meaning while being relevant to modern contexts (Klein et al., 2017).

Historically, hermeneutics has developed to address the complexities involved in interpreting ancient texts. Early church interpreters, such as Origen and Augustine, emphasised the importance of understanding both the literal and spiritual dimensions of Scripture. During the Reformation, figures like Martin Luther and John Calvin advanced hermeneutical practices by advocating for the centrality of Scripture (sola scriptura) and promoting grammatical-historical exegesis as a way to uncover the text's plain meaning. In the modern era, hermeneutics has expanded to include various methods, such as literary criticism, canonical criticism, and reader-response theory, each contributing unique insights to the interpretive process (Klein et al., 2017). These approaches recognise that biblical texts are not isolated artifacts but part of a dynamic, living tradition that speaks across generations.

A strong hermeneutical approach considers the historical context in which a biblical text was written, including the social, political, and religious dynamics of the time. This historical-critical method ensures the text is understood in its original setting, preventing anachronistic interpretations that impose modern ideas onto ancient writings (Virkler & Ayayo, 2023). Additionally, literary analysis examines the structure, genre, and rhetorical devices within a passage, providing insights into the author's intent and the text's impact on its original audience. For example, understanding the parables of Jesus requires recognising their dual role as both moral teachings and critiques of contemporary societal norms.

In addition to historical and literary considerations, hermeneutics emphasises the theological unity of Scripture. Canonical approaches, for instance, focus on interpreting individual texts within the broader narrative of the Bible as a cohesive story of God's redemptive work. This helps prevent selective readings from highlighting isolated verses while ignoring their connection to the overarching biblical message (Virkler & Ayayo, 2023). Furthermore, hermeneutics encourages preachers to be aware of their own biases, recognising how personal, cultural, or theological presuppositions may influence their interpretation of Scripture.

Following sound hermeneutical principles is crucial for avoiding the distortion of biblical messages and promoting a balanced and comprehensive understanding of Scripture. When preachers approach texts with intellectual honesty, methodological rigour, and theological humility, they are better equipped to communicate the Bible's transformative truths in a way that resonates with contemporary audiences while remaining faithful to its original meaning. Therefore, hermeneutics enhances a

preacher's interpretive skills and safeguards the theological integrity of the preaching ministry, ensuring that the Word of God is rightly understood and effectively proclaimed.

1.1.3 Theological and Ethical Risks of Selective Verse Usage

Selective verse usage, often called "cherry-picking", is a practice where preachers highlight specific biblical passages while ignoring others. This approach typically promotes particular theological, doctrinal, or personal agendas. The comprehensive nature of Scripture is compromised by isolating verses from their immediate literary, historical, and theological contexts. This can lead to a distortion of the intended meaning of the biblical text, resulting in theological errors and potentially harmful implications for the faith community (Reese, 1983). For example, emphasising verses that discuss financial blessings without considering the Bible's broader teachings on stewardship, sacrifice, and the dangers of materialism can create a distorted, prosperity-focused theology.

Theological distortions arising from selective verse usage often occur because Scripture is treated as a collection of isolated proof texts rather than a cohesive narrative of God's redemptive plan. For instance, passages like Philippians 4:13 ("I can do all things in who strengtheneth me") are frequently misapplied in sermons to promote a general sense of personal achievement or ambition, neglecting the verse's specific context of finding contentment in hardship. Such misinterpretations can mislead congregations into adopting beliefs or practices that diverge from the broader biblical message (Carson, 1996).

Selective preaching undermines sermons' theological integrity by prioritising specific themes or doctrines over a balanced examination of Scripture. This often results in fragmented theology, where congregants receive an incomplete or distorted understanding of biblical truths. For example, some preachers may emphasise judgment and condemnation while overlooking verses on grace, forgiveness, and restoration when addressing sin. This imbalance can foster a fear-based faith instead of a holistic understanding of salvation that reflects both God's justice and mercy.

Moreover, selective preaching has significant consequences for the dynamics within a congregation. It can create divisions by promoting narrow or exclusivist interpretations of Scripture, alienating individuals with differing perspectives. For example, an exclusive focus on verses addressing specific moral issues, without the surrounding biblical context of compassion and humility, can lead to polarisation within the church (Keller, 2015). In extreme cases, selective verse usage may be used to justify sectarianism, where particular groups claim theological superiority over others based on isolated scriptural interpretations.

There are also ethical concerns regarding the preacher's credibility and the congregation's trust. When congregants recognise that Scripture has been manipulated to further a specific agenda, their confidence in both the preacher and the integrity of the church's teaching can erode. Over time, this practice may lead to theological stagnation, as congregants are not encouraged to engage critically with the entirety of Scripture. Instead, they receive a curated selection of verses that align with predetermined messages, depriving them of the transformative power of encountering God's Word in its fullness.

To address this issue, preachers must adopt practices that uphold the integrity of Scripture. This includes ensuring biblical texts are interpreted within their broader narrative framework and applying sound hermeneutical principles to avoid cherry-picking. By doing so, preachers can promote a balanced understanding of Scripture that equips congregants for faithful Christian living while preserving the theological coherence of their teachings.

1.1.4 Historical Debates on Biblical Interpretation

The issue of selective verse usage is not a modern phenomenon; it has been debated and addressed throughout church history. From the early church councils to the Reformation and beyond, Christian leaders have grappled with how to interpret and apply Scripture faithfully. These historical debates have significantly shaped theological developments and church practices, providing valuable insights for addressing contemporary challenges in selective preaching (Galli, 1999).

In the early church, the formulation of orthodox doctrine often involved countering heretical movements that misused Scripture to support unorthodox teachings. For example, Marcion of Sinope (2nd century) rejected the Old Testament and selectively edited the New Testament, creating a division between law and grace that distorted the message of Scripture. The church responded by affirming the unity of the Old and New Testaments and the comprehensive nature of God's revelation—a principle that remains foundational for theological integrity in preaching today. This instance highlighted the dangers of selective interpretation and the necessity of considering the entire biblical canon when forming theological positions.

The Reformation (16th century) marked another significant period of reflection on biblical interpretation. Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin aimed to correct the perceived excesses of medieval church traditions, which they believed often obscured the message of Scripture. Their principle of “sola scriptura” (Scripture alone) emphasised the authority of the Bible over ecclesiastical traditions, encouraging a return to the text itself. However, the Reformers also recognised the risks of selective interpretation. Luther, for instance, warned against using Scripture to support personal agendas—famously challenging the sale of indulgences by emphasising biblical teachings on grace and repentance instead of financial contributions to the church. In his systematic theology, Calvin stressed the importance of interpreting individual passages within the broader theological framework of Scripture, arguing that every verse must be understood in light of the Bible's overarching narrative of redemption (McGrath, 2011).

In modern evangelicalism, debates surrounding selective verse usage have become even more pronounced due to the rise of denominational diversity and theological pluralism. Movements such as dispensationalism and prosperity theology have been critiqued for their reliance on selective scriptural interpretation. Proponents of prosperity theology, for example, often emphasise passages like Jeremiah 29:11 ("For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of affliction, to give you an end and patience") while neglecting the broader historical context of exile and suffering that frames the promise (Carson, 1996). These selective interpretations risk presenting a distorted gospel that prioritises material blessings over spiritual transformation.

Understanding historical perspectives on selective verse usage underscores the importance of theological integrity in preaching across all contexts and traditions. By learning from past challenges, preachers today can develop strategies to avoid similar pitfalls, ensuring their interpretations are both faithful to the text and relevant to the contemporary needs of their congregations. This entails not only adopting sound hermeneutical methods but also fostering a culture of accountability within the church, where sermons are regularly evaluated for their alignment with the whole counsel of Scripture. By doing so, the church can uphold the integrity of its teaching ministry and resist the temptation to prioritise personal or institutional agendas over the faithful proclamation of God's Word (Paddison, 2011).

Therefore, historical and theological reflections serve as both a warning and a guide for contemporary preachers. Whether intentional or accidental, the misuse of Scripture has far-reaching consequences for doctrine, community cohesion, and spiritual growth. Conversely, a commitment to holistic and faithful interpretation preserves theological coherence and strengthens the church's witness in a world increasingly sceptical of religious authority. By anchoring their preaching in the rich tradition of responsible biblical interpretation, preachers can honour both the text and its transformative power for individuals and communities alike.

1.1.5 Modern Examples of Selective Preaching Practices

Selective verse usage is widespread in modern Christianity, appearing in various denominational and theological contexts. This practice is particularly notable in movements or groups emphasising specific doctrines or agendas by isolating verses to support their claims. A prominent example is the INC. The INC frequently employs

selective verse interpretation to assert its doctrinal positions, including claims of being the "one true church" and the sole path to salvation. While their teachings often cite verses like John 10:16 ("And other sheep I have, that are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd"), Acts 20:28 George Lamsa Version ("Take heed therefore to yourselves and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, to feed the church of Christ which he has purchased with his blood"), Romans 16:16 ("Salute one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ salute you") to validate their exclusivist ecclesiology, they tend to overlook the surrounding passages and the broader biblical themes of inclusivity, grace, and the universal scope of Christ's mission.

Such selective preaching practices can distort the theological understanding of congregants. Preachers may misrepresent the Bible's overarching message by isolating verses from their literary and historical contexts, emphasising institutional loyalty over a personal relationship with Christ. In the case of the INC, this selective focus on verses supporting exclusivity can discourage members from exploring the wider scriptural narrative of God's grace and the inclusiveness of salvation offered through faith in Christ, and evidenced by works in other faiths. This approach fosters a narrow theological framework, shaping members' beliefs and practices in ways that may not align with the whole counsel of Scripture.

The implications of selective verse usage extend beyond doctrinal issues and affect congregational dynamics. In groups like the INC, selective preaching creates theological echo chambers where members are conditioned to accept specific

interpretations without question. This discourages critical engagement with Scripture and limits opportunities for spiritual growth. Additionally, the insularity fostered by selective preaching can alienate members from the broader Christian community, perpetuating divisions and reinforcing a sense of exclusivity. This dynamic impacts not only the spiritual development of individuals but also hinders the church's mission to embody unity and love as central aspects of its witness to the world.

The rise of digital media has further amplified the reach and influence of selective preaching (O'Lynn, 2023). Sermons and teachings highlighting isolated verses often circulate widely on social media platforms, affecting audiences across cultural and geographic boundaries. While these platforms provide opportunities for sharing biblical insights, they also facilitate the spread of distorted teachings that lack the depth and balance of comprehensive exegesis. This phenomenon underscores the urgency of equipping preachers with sound hermeneutical tools to counteract the spread of selective preaching and to ensure that the biblical message is faithfully represented in public discourse.

The persistence of selective preaching in modern contexts highlights the need for strategies prioritising theological integrity and comprehensive biblical interpretation. Preachers must resist the temptation to cherry-pick verses for the sake of simplicity, popularity, or institutional agendas. Instead, they should commit to presenting the full breadth of Scripture, fostering a more informed and spiritually enriched congregation that engages with God's Word in its entirety.

1.1.6 Strategies for Promoting Theological Integrity in Preaching

To counteract the adverse effects of selective verse usage, it is essential to adopt strategies that uphold theological integrity in preaching. These strategies involve a multifaceted approach, including rigorous exegetical methods, accountability structures, and ongoing theological education. Together, these measures ensure that sermons faithfully reflect the Bible's intended message and contribute to congregations' spiritual growth and doctrinal coherence.

1.1.6.a Rigorous Exegetical Methods

A critical step in addressing selective preaching is consistently applying sound exegetical practices. Exegesis involves interpreting biblical texts within their literary, historical, and theological contexts, ensuring that individual verses are understood as part of the broader biblical narrative. For example, passages like Jeremiah 29:11 ("For I know the thoughts that I think towards you...") are often used in isolation to promote messages of personal prosperity. However, a thorough exegetical approach considers the verse's context within the narrative of Israel's exile and restoration, offering a richer and more nuanced understanding of God's promises (Anderson, 2017).

Exegetical practices must also include an awareness of the literary forms and rhetorical devices used in Scripture. Understanding the genre of a passage—whether it is poetry, prophecy, narrative, or epistle—helps preachers interpret its meaning accurately and apply it appropriately. For instance, the hyperbolic language in Jesus' parables or the symbolic imagery in Revelation requires careful handling to avoid misinterpretation or liberalisation. By adhering to these exegetical principles,

preachers can provide sermons that are both faithful to the text and relevant to their congregants' lives.

1.1.6.b Accountability Structures

Accountability within the preaching ministry is another crucial element in ensuring theological integrity. Peer review processes, collaborative sermon preparation, and denominational oversight can help safeguard against selective verse usage. These structures create opportunities for feedback and critique, enabling preachers to refine their interpretations and ensure their messages align with sound biblical principles (Kim et al., 2022). For example, collaborative sermon preparation allows preachers to discuss their interpretations with colleagues, gaining insights that may prevent biases or oversights.

Accountability structures also foster transparency and trust within the congregation. When preachers demonstrate a commitment to responsible interpretation and openness to constructive feedback, they model humility and intellectual honesty. This approach not only enhances the preacher's credibility but also encourages congregants to engage more deeply with Scripture, promoting a culture of critical thinking and theological inquiry.

1.1.6.c Ongoing Theological Education

A commitment to lifelong learning is essential for preachers to stay equipped for biblical interpretation and contemporary ministry challenges. Theological education programs that emphasise hermeneutics, historical theology, and pastoral ethics prepare preachers to handle Scripture responsibly and to address complex theological

and social issues with wisdom and clarity. For instance, courses on historical-critical methods can help preachers understand biblical texts' cultural and historical contexts. At the same time, training in systematic theology ensures that their interpretations align with the broader doctrines of the Christian faith (Kim et al., 2022).

Furthermore, ongoing education helps preachers remain attentive to their congregations' evolving needs and challenges. As societal issues such as economic inequality, racial injustice, and mental health increasingly intersect with faith, preachers must be able to engage these topics thoughtfully and biblically. By pursuing continued theological development, they can ensure that their preaching remains relevant, compassionate, and rooted in Scripture.

1.1.6.d Holistic Preaching for Spiritual Growth

Ultimately, these strategies aim to foster holistic preaching that reflects the depth and breadth of Scripture. Preachers must prioritise God's Word's whole counsel, addressing its comforting promises and challenging demands. This approach ensures that sermons reinforce existing beliefs and inspire congregants to grow in understanding God's character and calling as Christ's followers.

By committing to theological integrity and comprehensive biblical interpretation, preachers can counter the dangers of selective verse usage and fulfil their sacred responsibility to proclaim the gospel faithfully. In doing so, they safeguard their congregations' spiritual health and uphold the transformative power of God's Word in shaping lives and communities.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Selectively using Bible verses in preaching creates serious issues for theological understanding and congregational health. Preachers may focus on specific passages that align with personal beliefs while ignoring others, leading to a distorted view of Scripture and fostering confusion within the church.

This practice undermines the integrity of the Bible by isolating verses from their proper context. The Bible should be understood within its complete historical, literary, and theological framework. When verses are cherry-picked, they lose their intended meanings, reducing Scripture to a collection of isolated morals that overlook its richness (Carson, 1996).

For example, focusing solely on verses about wealth can distort discussions about poverty, ignoring key messages about materialism and sacrificial giving. This selective interpretation creates faulty beliefs and can mislead congregants into adopting harmful practices like the prosperity gospel, which equates wealth with divine favour while neglecting calls for humility and service.

Cherry-picking also leads to theological confusion and division within the church. Different interpretations of selective preaching can create fragmentation among congregants, undermining unity and clarity on essential doctrines like salvation and grace. This disunity hampers the church's spiritual growth.

Moreover, preaching not rooted in the whole counsel of Scripture limits congregants' spiritual growth and understanding. Focusing on only specific themes may prevent

addressing crucial aspects of faith, like suffering and forgiveness, resulting in a shallow faith vulnerable to false teachings.

To counteract these issues, it is essential to recognise the harms of selective preaching and to implement strategies for responsible biblical interpretation. Preachers must ensure that their messages are grounded in the full context of Scripture and address contemporary issues, committing to careful exegesis and ongoing theological education (Anderson, 2017).

Therefore, the selective use of Bible verses in preaching threatens the church's theological integrity, leading to confusion, division, and spiritual harm. It is crucial for preachers to adopt holistic and responsible interpretations of Scripture to communicate the biblical message accurately and relevantly. This study aims to explore effective strategies for faithful biblical proclamation.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the biblical interpretations' historical and contemporary practices in preaching?
2. What psychological and sociological factors contribute to selective verse usage in preaching?
3. How does selective preaching impact congregational dynamics and spiritual formation?
4. What strategies can be implemented to ensure theological integrity in preaching?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is vital for maintaining theological integrity in preaching, as it addresses how selective Bible verse usage can distort Scripture's true message. Identifying ways to prevent cherry-picking verses for personal agendas promotes accurate biblical interpretation and responsible hermeneutics, considering historical and literary contexts. The research examines the effects of selective verse usage on congregational dynamics, including beliefs, ethical behaviours, and community cohesion. It also contributes to theological education by outlining challenges and best practices for preserving integrity in preaching, advocating for an inclusive and ecumenical approach to Christianity. Finally, the study offers practical strategies for preachers to avoid selective verse usage, ultimately supporting congregations' spiritual and doctrinal health.

1.4.1 Enhancing Theological Integrity in Preaching

This part of the study addresses the important need to maintain theological integrity in preaching by examining how selective use of Bible verses can compromise the faithful representation of Scripture. By exploring ways to avoid cherry-picking verses to support personal or institutional agendas, the study aims to promote a more accurate and comprehensive approach to biblical interpretation (Carson, 1996). Upholding theological integrity in preaching is crucial for preserving the authenticity of the Christian message and preventing the misrepresentation of Scripture. This supports congregations' spiritual health and doctrinal soundness, ensuring that teachings align with the broader biblical narrative and core Christian beliefs.

1.4.2 Promoting Responsible Biblical Interpretation

This part of the study emphasises the importance of responsible biblical interpretation, which involves using hermeneutical approaches that respect biblical texts' historical and literary context. By highlighting the risks of selective verse usage, the research advocates for comprehensive interpretive methods that provide a balanced and faithful understanding of Scripture (Stott, 1982). Encouraging responsible interpretation helps prevent theological distortions and promotes a more nuanced and well-informed engagement with the Bible. This contributes to a more informed and thoughtful approach to preaching, enhancing the credibility and relevance of Christian teachings in contemporary contexts.

1.4.3 Impact on Congregational Dynamics

This part of the study examines how selective verse usage influences congregational dynamics, including the formation of theological beliefs, ethical behaviours, and community cohesion. By scrutinising case studies and analysing the implications of selective preaching, the research offers insights into how these practices impact congregational life and unity (Maddix et al., 2020). Understanding the impact of selective preaching on congregational dynamics helps leaders address potential divisions and cultivate a more inclusive and cohesive church community (Galindo, 2004). It also informs strategies for fostering healthy theological discussions and enhancing congregations' overall spiritual and relational health (Galindo, 2004).

1.4.4 Contributing to Theological Education and Training

This part of the study contributes to theological education by providing insights into the challenges and best practices for upholding theological integrity in preaching. It offers

practical strategies and recommendations for preachers, seminarians, and theological educators to improve their interpretive skills and preaching methods (Markham, 2010). Improving theological education ensures that future leaders are well-prepared to navigate the complexities of biblical interpretation and preaching (Shaw, 2014). This contributes to a more resilient and well-informed clergy capable of delivering sermons that are both theologically sound and contextually relevant (Shaw, 2014).

1.4.5 Addressing Sectarianism and Exclusive Doctrines

This part of the study addresses the issue of sectarianism and exclusive doctrines resulting from selective verse usage, using specific case studies like the INC to illustrate the broader implications (Harper, 2017). It examines how selective preaching practices can lead to claims of exclusive salvation and divisive church membership policies (Elestrio, 1977; Tuggy, 1976). The study advocates for a more inclusive and ecumenical approach to Christianity by addressing these issues and encouraging dialogue and understanding among different Christian groups. It also provides a framework for addressing and mitigating the adverse effects of exclusive doctrines and sectarian practices.

1.4.6 Providing Practical Strategies for Preachers

This part of the study offers practical strategies for preachers to avoid selective verse usage and maintain theological integrity. These strategies include embracing rigorous exegetical methods, engaging in peer review, and pursuing ongoing theological education (Robinson, 2014). Offering actionable strategies helps preachers refine their practice and deliver sermons that faithfully represent the full scope of Scripture. This

contributes to more effective and ethical preaching, benefiting congregations' spiritual and doctrinal health.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

The study aims to examine Christian preaching practices in different denominations, focusing on the selective use of Bible verses and their impact. It will cover historical and modern instances, including movements like prosperity theology and exclusive sects. Potential limitations include variations in preaching styles and theological focuses across denominations and cultural contexts. Additionally, obtaining and analysing a representative set of sermons and congregational responses may pose challenges.

1.6 Conclusion

This study emphasises the importance of theological integrity in Christian preaching. It cautions against the selective use of Scripture, which can distort its message and lead to ethical issues, as demonstrated by the example of the INC. The study recommends implementing rigorous hermeneutical practices, establishing accountability, and promoting ongoing theological education to address these challenges. These measures aim to ensure that sermons accurately reflect Scripture and encourage unity among believers.

Additionally, the study advocates for a holistic approach to preaching that honours biblical texts' historical, literary, and theological contexts. This approach preserves the authenticity of the Christian message and fosters meaningful engagement with Scripture.

CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Historical Perspectives on Biblical Interpretation in Preaching

Understanding the historical development of biblical interpretation is essential for appreciating the current challenges and opportunities in preaching. The evolution of hermeneutical principles, from the Early Church Fathers through the Reformation to modern interpretative methods, reflects the diverse ways Scripture has been understood, contextualised, and communicated to the faithful. This section examines key historical milestones, highlighting the principles and challenges associated with each era.

2.1.1 Early Church Fathers and Hermeneutical Principles

The Early Church Fathers played a crucial role in establishing foundational principles for biblical interpretation, aiming to align Scripture with the theological needs of their communities (Pomeroy, 2020). They developed interpretive methods to uncover the text's literal and more profound spiritual meanings, emphasising its divine inspiration and relevance across various contexts. Origen, Augustine, and Jerome were among the most influential interpreters who shaped early Christian hermeneutics.

Origen (185–254 CE) emphasised a tripartite approach to Scripture, advocating for literal, moral, and allegorical interpretations (Hall, 2021). He believed that beneath the surface of biblical texts lie spiritual truths pointing to Christ and the divine plan of salvation. For instance, in Origen's interpretation of the Exodus story, the journey from Egypt symbolises the soul's journey from sin to salvation, with its spiritual significance outweighing any historical or literal dimensions. Origen's allegorical method was both

groundbreaking and controversial, as it expanded the interpretive horizons of Scripture but sometimes led to speculative readings disconnected from the text's original context.

Augustine (354–430 CE) combined theological rigour with philosophical insights, arguing that Scripture must be read within the framework of "faith-seeking understanding" (Tornau, 2024). He championed the rule of charity, teaching that all biblical interpretations must ultimately promote love for God and neighbour. Augustine's work, "On Christian Doctrine", outlined principles for understanding ambiguous passages, emphasising reliance on more explicit texts and the broader theological message of Scripture. His focus on theological coherence and the centrality of Christ in interpretation continues to influence Christian preaching today.

Jerome (347–420 CE), known for translating the Latin Vulgate, emphasised biblical interpretation's linguistic and textual integrity (Hulley, 1944). He advocated studying Scripture in its original languages and contexts to preserve its meaning. Jerome's work laid the foundation for later approaches prioritising textual fidelity, a principle still central to responsible preaching.

While the Early Church Fathers provided rich interpretive frameworks, their methods often blended theology with the prevailing philosophical paradigms of their time, such as Platonism (Wood, 2022). This sometimes resulted in interpretations that prioritised spiritual or allegorical meanings at the expense of historical and literary contexts.

2.1.2 Reformation Contributions: Sola Scriptura and Systematic Approaches

The 16th-century Reformation marked a crucial turning point in biblical interpretation. Reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin challenged the dominance of ecclesiastical traditions that often overshadowed the authority of Scripture. Their emphasis on sola scriptura reaffirmed the centrality of the Bible in matters of faith and practice.

Martin Luther (1483–1546) argued that Scripture should be interpreted based on its plain meaning, which is accessible to all believers through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Hoselton, 2023). He emphasised the perspicuity of Scripture, teaching that its core message, particularly concerning salvation, is clear and understandable to the average reader. For example, Luther's translation of the Bible into German democratised access to Scripture, allowing laypeople to engage directly with the text instead of relying solely on clerical interpretations. Luther's insistence on the primacy of Scripture laid the foundation for modern expository preaching, which focuses on the clear communication of biblical truths.

John Calvin (1509–1564) introduced a systematic approach to biblical interpretation, highlighting the importance of considering historical, grammatical, and theological contexts (Aubert, 2022). He viewed Scripture as a unified whole, with Christ at its centre. Calvin's commentaries cover nearly the entire Bible and reflect his methodical approach. For instance, his interpretation of the Psalms integrates their historical setting with their messianic and theological significance. Calvin's rigorous hermeneutics established a framework for Reformed preaching, which remains a cornerstone of systematic theology and careful exegesis.

Key principles of the Reformation included sola scriptura, which posits the Bible as the sole authority for faith and practice. This challenged ecclesiastical traditions and speculative interpretations. There was also a renewed focus on the literal and historical meaning of the texts, rejecting excessive allegorisation. Reformers emphasised that preaching must faithfully reflect the Word of God, with sermons serving as an exposition of Scripture rather than a platform for personal opinions (Franklin, 2018). However, while the Reformation promoted clarity and accessibility, its polemical context sometimes led to overly rigid interpretations, which could exclude alternative readings that might enrich understanding.

2.1.3 Modern Interpretative Methods and Their Challenges

The Enlightenment (17th–18th centuries) introduced a more scientific approach to biblical interpretation, emphasising historical and cultural analysis (Bristow, 2018). Scholars such as Julius Wellhausen and Rudolf Bultmann sought to uncover the historical realities behind biblical texts. Key contributions of this period include source criticism, which analyses the origins of biblical texts to identify their sources and development; form criticism, which examines literary forms and their function in the original community; and redaction criticism, which explores how editors shaped the biblical narratives to convey theological messages. While these methods are invaluable for understanding historical contexts, they sometimes reduce the Scripture to mere historical artifacts, neglecting its theological and spiritual dimensions.

In response to the perceived limitations of historical-critical methods, the 20th century saw a resurgence of literary approaches. Scholars such as Robert Alter and Brevard Childs emphasised the Bible's literary artistry and canonical unity. Key contributions

include narrative criticism, which explores the Bible as a cohesive story with recurring themes and theological messages, and canonical criticism, which interprets texts within the framework of the entire biblical canon, focusing on their theological coherence (Sivasubramanian, 2019). While these approaches restored focus on theological meaning, they sometimes overlooked the historical grounding of the text.

Postmodern hermeneutics challenges the notion of a single authoritative interpretation, emphasising the reader's role in constructing meaning. This approach, influenced by scholars like Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jacques Derrida, highlights the diversity of interpretations that emerge from different cultural and personal contexts (Frazier, 2023). However, excessive focus on reader response risks undermining the text's original meaning, and postmodern approaches can lead to interpretative relativism, where all readings are considered equally valid, diluting theological coherence.

Contemporary scholarship often seeks to integrate the strengths of historical, literary, and theological methods (Farias et al., 2017). This hybrid approach recognises the value of historical-critical insights while affirming the Bible's spiritual and theological authority.

The history of biblical interpretation reveals a rich tapestry of methods, each contributing to our understanding of Scripture while presenting unique challenges. From the allegorical and spiritual focus of the Early Church Fathers to the literal and systematic approaches of the Reformation, as well as the nuanced methodologies of modern scholarship, each era has enriched the preacher's task. However, these

methods also highlight the need for balance—honouring the text's historical and literary integrity while maintaining its theological and spiritual authority.

2.2 Theological Foundations of Expository Preaching

Expository preaching is a fundamental aspect of Christian ministry, rooted in the commitment to faithfully interpret and communicate the Word of God. Its purpose is to present the meaning of biblical texts clearly, accurately, and comprehensively, ensuring that sermons are firmly grounded in Scripture. This section will explore the theological principles that underlie expository preaching and examine its relevance in addressing contemporary issues through contextualisation.

2.2.1 Principles of Expository Preaching

2.2.1.a Definition and Core Commitment

Expository preaching involves systematically explaining a passage of Scripture, drawing out its meaning in light of its literary, historical, and theological contexts, and applying its truths to the congregation's lives (Stott, 1982). At its core, expository preaching prioritises Scripture as the sole authority in the sermon, ensuring that the message is derived from the text rather than from the preacher's personal opinions or agendas. This method reflects the belief that the Bible, as the inspired Word of God, possesses inherent power and authority to transform lives (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

2.2.1.b Emphasis on the Biblical Text

The primary focus of expository preaching is the biblical text itself, with the preacher acting as a servant of the Word (Edwards, 2014). This principle requires careful exegesis, where the preacher uncovers the text's original meaning by considering its

grammatical structure, literary form, and historical background. For instance, when preaching on the parables of Jesus, the sermon would not only explore their spiritual messages but also situate them within the cultural and social context of first-century Judea. This adherence to the text ensures that the sermon reflects the intent of the biblical authors and aligns with the broader narrative of Scripture.

2.2.1.c Systematic and Sequential Approach

Expository preaching often involves systematically working through entire books or sections of the Bible, allowing congregations to engage with Scripture in its entirety (Highlander, 2021). This approach prevents preachers from selectively focusing on passages that align with their preferences while neglecting complex or controversial topics. For example, preaching a series on the Book of Romans would compel the preacher to address complex themes such as justification, sanctification, and election, fostering a comprehensive understanding of Paul's theology.

2.2.1.d Doctrinal and Theological Coherence

Expository preaching upholds Scripture's theological coherence by interpreting individual texts within the framework of the Bible's overarching narrative (Highlander, 2021). This includes recognising Christ's centrality in both the Old and New Testaments, as illustrated in passages like Luke 24:27, where Jesus explains how the Scriptures point to Him. Expository preaching ensures that sermons reflect the unity and continuity of God's redemptive work by emphasising this Christocentric focus.

2.2.1.e Application to Life and Discipleship

While grounded in rigorous exegesis, expository preaching also emphasises practical application, connecting biblical truths to the lived experiences of congregants. This involves translating the text's theological message into actionable principles that guide ethical decision-making, spiritual growth, and daily living. For example, a sermon on Micah 6:8 ("I will shew thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requireth of thee: Verily, to do judgment, and to love mercy, and to walk solicitous with thy God") would explore its implications for personal relationships, social justice, and worship practices.

2.2.1.f Spiritual Formation of the Congregation

The goal of expository preaching is the spiritual formation of the congregation, leading them into a deeper relationship with God and a greater understanding of His will (Wilhoit & Howard, 2020). By faithfully expounding Scripture, preachers equip believers with a biblical worldview that shapes their values, priorities, and actions. This commitment to discipleship aligns with the church's mission to nurture mature, Christ-centred followers who embody the principles of God's Kingdom in their communities.

2.2.2 Contextualisation and Contemporary Applications

2.2.2.a The Need for Contextualisation

Expository preaching is deeply rooted in the biblical text, yet it must also confront contemporary audiences' unique challenges and questions. Contextualisation involves interpreting Scripture in ways that resonate with modern congregations' cultural, social, and spiritual realities without compromising its original meaning (Vaughn, 2013). Striking this balance ensures that the Bible's eternal truths are communicated in relevant and transformative ways for today's listeners (Keller, 2015).

2.2.2.b Adapting to Cultural and Social Contexts

Contextualisation acknowledges that congregations are shaped by their cultural and social environments, influencing how they perceive and respond to biblical teachings (de Vries, 2018). For example, a sermon on stewardship may emphasise generosity and financial integrity in a wealthy congregation while focusing on trust in God's provision in an economically disadvantaged community. By addressing their audience's specific needs and circumstances, preachers make Scripture more accessible and impactful.

2.2.2.c Engaging Contemporary Issues

Expository preaching must also engage with contemporary issues, demonstrating the relevance of Scripture to the moral, ethical, and existential challenges of modern life (Myers, 2024). For instance, sermons on topics such as justice, racial reconciliation, or environmental stewardship can draw from biblical principles to guide navigating complex societal issues. Preachers must exercise discernment and theological depth to ensure that these applications remain faithful to the text while addressing the pressing concerns of their congregations.

2.2.2.d Leveraging Modern Tools and Technology

The digital age offers new opportunities for contextualising expository preaching, enabling preachers to reach broader audiences and enhance their messages through multimedia tools (Jeffress, 2008). Visual aids, online resources, and social media platforms can help communicate biblical truths in engaging and memorable ways. For example, a sermon on the parable of the Good Samaritan might include visual

storytelling elements to illustrate the cultural tension between Jews and Samaritans, deepening the congregation's understanding of the text's significance.

2.2.2.e Balancing Relevance and Faithfulness

While contextualisation is essential, it must not compromise the faithfulness of expository preaching to the biblical text (Martin, 2022). Preachers should resist the temptation to tailor their messages solely to popular trends or societal expectations, as this risks diluting the transformative power of Scripture. Instead, contextualisation should serve as a bridge between the ancient world of the Bible and the contemporary lives of believers, ensuring that God's Word remains both timeless and timely.

2.2.2.f Challenges of Contextualisation

One of the most significant challenges of contextualisation is avoiding the pitfalls of cultural accommodation, where biblical teachings are altered to fit contemporary values (Fanning, 2009). For instance, when addressing issues like sexual ethics or materialism, preachers may feel pressured to soften the Bible's countercultural message. Expository preaching must navigate these tensions with courage and integrity, presenting the truth of Scripture in a way that challenges and inspires without distorting its meaning.

2.2.2.g The Role of Preachers as Cultural Interpreters

In contemporary applications of expository preaching, preachers act as cultural interpreters, helping congregants apply Scripture to the complexities of modern life (Downie, 2018). This role requires not only biblical literacy but also an understanding of cultural trends, philosophical ideologies, and societal dynamics. By bridging these

worlds, preachers empower their congregations to live out their faith authentically and effectively in their respective contexts.

The theological foundations of expository preaching are deeply rooted in a commitment to the authority, clarity, and sufficiency of Scripture. Its principles emphasise fidelity to the text, theological coherence, and practical application, ensuring that sermons reflect the whole counsel of God's Word. Through contextualisation, expository preaching remains relevant to modern audiences, addressing their unique challenges while preserving the integrity of biblical teachings. Together, these elements make expository preaching a powerful tool for spiritual formation, equipping believers to grow in faith and engage the world as faithful disciples of Christ.

2.3 Challenges of Selective Verse Usage in Preaching

Selective verse usage, commonly called "cherry-picking", presents a significant challenge in preaching (Nel, 2024). This practice occurs when preachers highlight isolated passages to support their personal, ideological, or doctrinal agendas. Although it may simplify sermon preparation or make messages more appealing, it poses serious risks to the church's theological integrity and its congregants' spiritual health. The challenges of selective verse usage can be divided into two main areas: theological distortions and ethical concerns and the practical implications of cherry-picking Scriptures. Both aspects contribute to the widening gap between faithful biblical interpretation and the fragmented approach that selective preaching fosters.

2.3.1 Theological Distortions and Ethical Concerns

2.3.1.a Theological Distortions

One of the most significant dangers of selective verse usage is the resulting theological distortion (Firestone, 2014). By isolating specific passages and ignoring the broader context, preachers often fail to convey the whole counsel of God's Word. This practice undermines the integrity of Scripture and leads to misrepresentations of biblical truths. For instance, focusing exclusively on verses highlighting prosperity or material blessings while neglecting Scriptures that address suffering, humility, and the dangers of wealth (e.g., Matthew 6:24 and Luke 18:24-25) can create a theology that presents a superficial view of the Christian life—one that equates material success with spiritual maturity or divine favour.

The Bible offers a comprehensive understanding of God's will, including the joys and struggles of the Christian journey. Selective preaching distorts this by cherry-picking verses that reflect a narrow and partial view of biblical truths. For example, using Philippians 4:13 ("I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me") out of context to promote self-empowerment or personal success ignores the broader context of suffering and contentment present in the apostle Paul's life (Philippians 4:11-12). This not only misinterprets the text but also fails to convey the fuller theological message of perseverance and dependence on Christ in all circumstances. The theological distortions resulting from selective verse usage can lead to imbalanced doctrines. By emphasising particular topics, such as health and wealth, without addressing broader biblical teachings on repentance, holiness, and the cost of discipleship, preachers may foster a shallow understanding of salvation and discipleship that does not align with the complete biblical message of grace,

redemption, and transformation. This misrepresentation can create theological confusion within congregations and hinder their spiritual growth, leading them to believe that Christianity is primarily about material prosperity or personal achievement rather than spiritual formation and alignment with God's will.

2.3.1.b Ethical Concerns

Selective verse usage also raises significant ethical concerns, particularly concerning how preachers use Scripture to advance personal, institutional, or ideological agendas (Plantak, 2017). When preachers cherry-pick verses to serve their own interests or preferences, they risk manipulating Scripture for selfish purposes. This misuse of God's Word can lead to the exploitation of congregants, particularly when passages are cited out of context to justify ethically questionable actions or attitudes. For example, a preacher might isolate passages about tithing and financial blessings to pressure congregants into giving beyond their means while ignoring the Bible's broader teachings on generosity, contentment, and sacrificial giving (2 Corinthians 9:7 and Luke 6:38).

The ethical implications extend to issues of authority and trust within the church. When preachers engage in selective preaching, they misuse their influence to manipulate beliefs and behaviours, which can result in congregational division (Djupe & Neiheisel, 2022). Members may be coerced into adopting narrow, sectarian views that promote exclusivity or division instead of the unity and love emphasised in Scripture. Additionally, the ethical harm of selective preaching can impact a congregation's spiritual and emotional well-being, as they may internalise distorted beliefs that affect their relationships with others, the church, and God.

2.3.2 Practical Implications of Cherry-Picking Scriptures

2.3.2.a Doctrinal Confusion

Selective verse usage can lead to doctrinal confusion among congregants. When preachers rely on cherry-picked passages to support specific theological points, they risk presenting a fragmented and incomplete picture of biblical doctrine (Rouse, 2018). For instance, emphasising verses highlighting God's promises of blessing without acknowledging the reality of suffering or the call to holiness may mislead congregants into believing that faithfulness guarantees an easy or prosperous life. This lack of balance can leave believers unprepared for the challenges they encounter in their faith journey, potentially leading to disillusionment or spiritual crises during tough times.

Furthermore, this lack of doctrinal coherence can create confusion about core Christian beliefs. Congregants may struggle to reconcile verses focusing on God's judgment and justice with those emphasising His mercy and grace. Without proper theological context, these seemingly contradictory themes can generate internal tension or confusion. Doctrinal clarity, which is central to the church's witness and mission, is weakened when selective preaching prioritises certain doctrines over others, resulting in a skewed understanding of the Christian faith.

2.3.2.b Weakening of Spiritual Formation

The practical effect of selective verse usage is a weakening of spiritual formation within the congregation (Barton et al., 2014). Spiritual growth is not solely about receiving affirming or easy messages; it involves engaging with the full scope of Scripture that challenges, comforts, and transforms. When sermons focus only on themes like prosperity, comfort, or blessing, congregants may overlook the biblical call to

repentance, self-denial, and holiness (Matthew 16:24). This can lead to a superficial spiritual life lacking depth and resilience, especially when facing life's trials or making difficult decisions aligned with God's will.

Additionally, cherry-picking verses can hinder the development of mature disciples who understand the complexities of the Christian faith. Spiritual formation requires a holistic approach to Scripture—engaging with texts about justice, mercy, suffering, and perseverance alongside teachings of love, grace, and forgiveness. By neglecting certain aspects of the Bible's message, preachers may unintentionally impede the growth of spiritually mature believers who can navigate the complexities of the Christian journey with wisdom and faith.

2.3.2.c Erosion of Trust in Preaching

Over time, selective preaching can significantly erode trust in both the preacher and the pulpit. Congregants who recognise that Scripture is being manipulated for specific agendas may begin to question the authenticity of the preaching ministry. This diminishes the impact of sermons, as the congregation may no longer view preaching as a faithful proclamation of God's Word. Instead, it might be seen as a tool for manipulation or a vehicle for promoting personal or institutional agendas. Trust is foundational to effective preaching; it can be challenging to regain once lost (Malmström, 2016).

Moreover, when selective preaching becomes commonplace, it creates an environment where biblical literacy and critical engagement with Scripture are discouraged (Kim-Cragg, 2022). Congregants may become passive listeners who

accept Scripture at face value without questioning its context or considering its broader implications. This not only stunts individual intellectual and spiritual growth but also weakens the theological foundations of the entire church community.

The challenges posed by selective verse usage in preaching are extensive, leading to both theological distortions and practical consequences. When Scripture is misused for personal or ideological purposes, preachers risk distorting the Bible's message and guiding their congregations into confusion and spiritual harm. Theologically, selective preaching undermines the integrity of the Word and creates unbalanced doctrines that fail to account for the full scope of God's redemptive work. Ethically, it compromises the preacher's role as a trustworthy guide and can exploit congregants for personal or institutional gain. Practically, the consequences include doctrinal confusion, weakened spiritual formation, and erosion of trust in the preaching ministry. To address these challenges, it is essential for preachers to adopt responsible hermeneutical methods, ensuring that they present the whole counsel of Scripture and engage their congregations in a holistic and transformative encounter with God's Word.

2.4 Psychological and Sociological Influences on Preaching Practices

Preaching is not conducted in a vacuum; it is influenced by a complex interplay of psychological and sociological factors affecting how Scripture is interpreted, communicated, and received (Shaw et al., 2020). These factors impact both the preacher's approach to sermon preparation and delivery as well as the congregation's response to the message. Two major areas of influence are cognitive biases in interpretation, which stem from individual psychological tendencies, and social and cultural dynamics, which arise from the broader context in which preaching occurs.

Understanding these influences is essential for recognising potential pitfalls in preaching and developing strategies that ensure theological integrity and effective communication of Scripture.

2.4.1 Cognitive Biases in Interpretation

2.4.1.a Definition and Role of Cognitive Biases

Cognitive biases are systematic patterns of deviation from rational judgment that affect how individuals process information and make decisions (Korteling et al., 2023). These biases can unconsciously influence preachers as they interpret Scripture, shaping how they perceive, prioritise, and communicate biblical truths. While preachers aim to expound the Word of God faithfully, their own interpretations can inadvertently reflect their preferences, assumptions, and personal experiences rather than the text's intended meaning.

2.4.1.b Confirmation Bias

One of the most prevalent cognitive biases in preaching is confirmation bias, which is the tendency to seek out and emphasise information that supports pre-existing beliefs while ignoring or downplaying evidence that contradicts them (Nickerson, 1998). In the context of preaching, this bias can lead to selective verse usage, where preachers highlight passages that align with their theological views or personal agendas while neglecting those that challenge or complicate their position. For example, a preacher who prioritises promises of prosperity and blessings may overemphasise verses like Jeremiah 29:11 or Malachi 3:10 while avoiding passages discussing suffering, sacrifice, or warnings against materialism.

Confirmation bias can also reinforce denominational or doctrinal boundaries. Preachers may selectively interpret Scripture to validate their theological tradition, even when alternative interpretations offer a more balanced or comprehensive understanding of the text. This tendency risks perpetuating theological rigidity and discouraging open, critical engagement with Scripture.

2.4.1.c Anchoring Bias

Anchoring bias refers to the cognitive tendency to rely too heavily on initial information when making decisions or forming judgments (Rezaei, 2021). This bias may manifest in biblical interpretation as a preacher's overreliance on a single, familiar framework for understanding Scripture, even when new insights or contexts call for re-evaluation. For example, a preacher accustomed to reading a passage allegorically might overlook its historical or literal meaning, limiting their ability to fully engage with the text.

Anchoring bias can also affect how preachers approach sermon preparation. A preacher who starts with a predetermined theme or conclusion may unintentionally shape their exegesis to fit that framework rather than allowing the text itself to guide the message. This approach undermines the integrity of the sermon and risks misrepresenting the biblical passage.

2.4.1.d Availability Heuristic

Another cognitive factor influencing preaching is the availability heuristic, which refers to the tendency to base interpretations or decisions on information most readily accessible in memory (Lai, 2023). Preachers may gravitate toward familiar verses,

themes, or illustrations, often repeating well-known passages or interpretations rather than exploring less familiar but equally important parts of Scripture. While this tendency can make sermons more relatable to congregations, it also risks neglecting the diversity and richness of the biblical canon.

For instance, focusing predominantly on New Testament texts while neglecting the Old Testament can result in a fragmented understanding of the Bible's unity and continuity. Similarly, overemphasising certain books, such as Psalms or Pauline epistles, while underrepresenting wisdom literature or prophetic books limits the congregation's exposure to the full range of biblical teachings.

2.4.1.e Overcoming Cognitive Biases

To address cognitive biases, preachers must cultivate self-awareness and adopt practices encouraging intellectual humility and openness (Koetke et al., 2024). Regular engagement with diverse theological perspectives, peer reviews of sermons, and rigorous hermeneutical training help preachers recognise and mitigate their biases. Additionally, approaching Scripture with a posture of prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit fosters a deeper understanding of God's Word, enabling preachers to move beyond their limitations and faithfully communicate the text's intended message.

2.4.2 Social and Cultural Dynamics in Sermon Preparation

2.4.2.a Impact of Congregational Expectations

Sermon preparation is often influenced by the congregation's expectations, which are shaped by cultural norms, denominational traditions, and prevailing social issues

(Esposito, 2015). Preachers may feel pressured to address topics that resonate with their audience's immediate concerns, such as financial security, mental health, or social justice. While responding to these needs is an essential aspect of pastoral ministry, it can create tension between addressing contemporary issues and remaining faithful to the biblical text.

For example, in affluent congregations, preachers may focus on messages of gratitude and stewardship while avoiding challenging texts about sacrificial giving or warnings against materialism. Similarly, sermons may emphasise themes of liberation and justice in communities affected by injustice or oppression, sometimes at the expense of addressing personal accountability or spiritual transformation. Balancing congregational expectations with theological integrity requires preachers to navigate these dynamics with discernment and a commitment to faithfully represent the whole counsel of Scripture.

2.4.2.b Cultural Narratives and Worldviews

Preaching is also shaped by the broader cultural narratives and worldviews that influence both the preacher and the congregation. In Western contexts, individualism and self-determination often shape how Scripture is interpreted and applied (Ostafiński, 2023). Passages like Philippians 4:13 or Jeremiah 29:11 are frequently presented as affirmations of personal achievement or success, reflecting cultural values rather than the message's original intent.

Conversely, in collectivist cultures, sermons may emphasise communal themes such as unity, mutual support, and obedience to authority, potentially downplaying texts that

highlight individual responsibility or personal freedom in Christ. Recognising the impact of cultural worldviews on preaching is crucial for avoiding cultural accommodation and ensuring that sermons remain grounded in the truth of Scripture.

2.4.2.c Social Issues and Contemporary Relevance

Preachers often face the challenge of addressing pressing social issues, such as racial injustice, gender equality, environmental stewardship, or political polarisation. While these topics are deeply relevant to modern audiences, they require careful theological engagement to ensure biblical principles are not distorted to fit contemporary ideologies. For example, a sermon on justice and equity might draw on texts like Micah 6:8 or Isaiah 1:17. However, it must count for the Bible's broader teachings on mercy, humility, and the gospel's transformative power.

Navigating these dynamics requires preachers to integrate biblical exegesis with cultural analysis, demonstrating how Scripture speaks to both timeless truths and current realities. By doing so, they can offer a prophetic voice that challenges societal norms while remaining faithful to God's Word.

2.4.2.d Globalisation and Digital Media

In the digital age, preaching is increasingly influenced by the global exchange of ideas and the accessibility of online resources. Social media platforms, podcasts, and sermon archives expose preachers and congregations to various theological perspectives, cultural contexts, and preaching styles. While this global church's connectedness enriches its understanding of Scripture, it also introduces challenges,

such as the temptation to mimic popular trends or prioritise mass appeal over theological depth (Mannerfelt, 2022).

Preachers must critically engage with these influences, discerning which resources align with their theological convictions and the needs of their congregation. Additionally, they must be mindful of the cultural and contextual differences that shape how biblical messages are received in diverse settings.

2.4.2.e Strategies for Navigating Social and Cultural Dynamics

To effectively navigate the complexities of social and cultural influences, preachers should adopt a contextualised approach to sermon preparation that combines theological rigour with cultural sensitivity (Sutherland, 2022). This involves conducting thorough exegesis to ensure that sermons are rooted in Scripture rather than cultural assumptions. Preachers should also engage with diverse theological voices and perspectives to broaden their understanding of Scripture and its application. Building relationships with their congregation is essential for understanding their unique needs, challenges, and cultural context.

Additionally, preachers should emphasise the timeless truths of the gospel while addressing contemporary issues with humility and discernment. By integrating these strategies, preachers can ensure their sermons are both theologically sound and culturally relevant, enhancing their congregation's spiritual growth and fostering a more inclusive and understanding church community.

The psychological and sociological influences on preaching practices highlight the importance of self-awareness, cultural sensitivity, and theological fidelity in sermon preparation and delivery. Cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias and anchoring bias, can unconsciously shape how preachers interpret and present Scripture. Furthermore, social and cultural dynamics influence the topics and themes that resonate with congregations. Addressing these challenges requires a commitment to rigorous exegesis, ongoing theological education, and a humble attitude that seeks to honour God's Word above personal or cultural preferences. By navigating these influences with discernment, preachers can faithfully communicate the transformative power of Scripture in a contextually relevant and theologically sound way.

2.5 Theological Consequences of Selective Preaching

Selective preaching, which involves isolating specific biblical passages to emphasise personal or ideological agendas while neglecting the broader narrative of Scripture, has significant theological consequences. These effects extend beyond individual sermons and influence the church's doctrinal foundation as well as its relational and communal dynamics. Two important areas impacted by this practice are doctrinal incoherence, where selective preaching creates fragmented or distorted theological understandings, and the effects on ecclesiology and community cohesion, which disrupt the unity and mission of the church.

2.5.1 Doctrinal Incoherence

2.5.1.a Fragmented Theology

Selective preaching often results in fragmented theology, where biblical truths are presented in isolation rather than as part of the cohesive and comprehensive narrative

of Scripture (Tu, 2019). The Bible serves as a unified revelation of God's character, will, and redemptive plan; its teachings are meant to complement and clarify one another. When preachers focus solely on specific verses or themes, they fail to convey the interconnectivity of Scripture, leading to a disjointed understanding of God's Word. For instance, overemphasising verses about God's love (e.g., John 3:16) while neglecting passages on His justice and holiness (e.g., Romans 1:18 or Hebrews 12:29) can create a theology that minimises the seriousness of sin and the necessity of repentance. Conversely, an exclusive focus on judgment and wrath while overlooking grace and mercy may foster a legalistic and fear-driven faith. Both approaches result in a distorted view of God's nature and the gospel message.

Fragmented theology is particularly evident in prosperity theology, where verses about blessings (e.g., Malachi 3:10 or 3 John 1:2) are often highlighted without consideration of the broader biblical teachings on suffering, stewardship, and self-denial (e.g., Matthew 16:24 or 2 Corinthians 12:9). This imbalance creates a skewed understanding of God's promises, leading congregants to equate faith with financial gain or personal success while neglecting the call to sacrificial living and dependence on God's grace.

2.5.1.b Contradictory Doctrines

Selective preaching can also produce contradictory doctrines. Different sermons or theological positions may conflict with one another due to a lack of a cohesive interpretive framework (Mayer, 2024). For example, a preacher might use Ephesians 2:8-9 ("For by grace you have been saved through faith...") to emphasise salvation by grace, but later refer to James 2:17 ("Faith without works is dead") to stress the

necessity of works without adequately explaining how these passages harmonise within the broader doctrine of salvation.

Such inconsistencies can confuse congregants and undermine their ability to develop a robust and coherent understanding of Christian theology. Doctrinal incoherence impacts individual beliefs and weakens the church's capacity to present a unified witness to the world. A church that communicates contradictory messages risks losing credibility and fostering division among its members.

2.5.1.c Dilution of Core Doctrines

Over time, selective preaching can dilute essential Christian doctrines, such as the Trinity, Christology, and soteriology. When preachers prioritise certain aspects of Scripture while ignoring others, they inadvertently downplay key theological truths foundational to the faith. For instance, neglecting to preach on Christ's incarnation and divinity in favour of messages that focus solely on His moral teachings can lead to a diminished understanding of His unique role as the Saviour and mediator between God and humanity (Guder, 1994).

Similarly, overlooking the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in favour of more "practical" topics can leave congregants without a full appreciation of the Spirit's role in empowering believers, guiding the church, and applying salvation. This dilution of doctrine results in a faith less rooted in the richness of biblical teaching and more susceptible to error and cultural influence.

2.5.2 Impacts on Ecclesiology and Community Cohesion

2.5.2.a Distorted Ecclesiology

Selective preaching profoundly affects ecclesiology, the theological understanding of the church. Scripture describes the church as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27), a holy temple (Ephesians 2:21-22), and a people called to proclaim God's praises (1 Peter 2:9). These metaphors emphasise the church's unity, diversity, and mission. However, selective preaching that emphasises institutional loyalty, exclusivity, or specific agendas can distort these biblical images of the church.

For example, sectarian groups like the INC often use selective verses to assert their claim as the "one true church". They cite passages such as John 10:16 or Acts 20:28 while ignoring broader biblical themes of inclusivity and unity in Christ (Ephesians 4:4-6; Galatians 3:28). This narrow focus fosters a distorted ecclesiology that prioritises membership in a specific institution over the universal nature of Christ's body.

Such approaches undermine the teaching that the church is a global, Spirit-empowered community united by faith in Christ, transcending ethnic, cultural, and denominational boundaries. Instead, congregants may develop an insular mindset that views those outside their group with suspicion or hostility, which hinders the church's mission to embody God's love and reconciliation in the world.

2.5.2.b Erosion of Community Cohesion

Selective preaching can also weaken the cohesion and unity of the local church community. When sermons prioritise certain theological perspectives or social issues over others, they risk alienating segments of the congregation whose experiences or

beliefs differ. For example, an emphasis on financial prosperity may resonate with wealthy congregants but alienate those struggling with poverty or unemployment. Similarly, focusing exclusively on one political or social agenda can create divisions among members with differing viewpoints, turning the pulpit into a source of contention rather than unity (Schade, 2024).

The Bible calls the church to unity in diversity, celebrating its members' unique gifts and perspectives while remaining rooted in shared faith and purpose (1 Corinthians 12:12-26). Selective preaching disrupts this balance by prioritising particular viewpoints, often at the expense of others, which can lead to fragmentation within the congregation. Over time, this division can erode trust in leadership, weaken relationships among members, and hinder the church's ability to function as a unified body.

2.5.2.c Undermining the Church's Witness

The theological and communal consequences of selective preaching extend beyond the church itself and affect its witness to the broader world (González Gaitano, 2016). A divided or theologically incoherent church struggles to communicate the gospel effectively, as internal conflicts and contradictions undermine its credibility. Jesus emphasised that the unity of His followers would be a powerful testimony to the world of His divine mission (John 17:21). However, selective preaching creates barriers to this unity, weakening the church's ability to reflect God's love and truth.

Furthermore, when selective preaching results in an exclusive or insular ecclesiology, the church may fail to engage with its surrounding community, limiting its impact as a

beacon of hope and transformation (Choromanski, 2023). By focusing inward and prioritising institutional agendas, the church risks neglecting its call to serve and evangelise, diminishing its effectiveness as the salt and light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16).

The theological consequences of selective preaching are both profound and far-reaching. Fostering doctrinal incoherence fragments the biblical message, creating confusion and weakening the church's theological foundation. This, in turn, distorts the church's self-understanding and disrupts its communal life, leading to divisions within the body of Christ and undermining its witness to the world. To address these challenges, preachers must commit to faithfully expounding the whole counsel of Scripture, presenting a balanced and coherent theology reflecting God's revelation's unity and richness. In doing so, the church can remain grounded in truth, strengthened in unity, and empowered to fulfil its mission as the body of Christ.

2.6 Current Strategies for Addressing Selective Preaching

Selective preaching has the potential to distort Scripture and negatively impact congregational life, highlighting the need for intentional strategies that uphold theological integrity and ensure responsible interpretation. Scholars and practitioners have proposed and implemented various methods to tackle this challenge, underscoring the importance of sound hermeneutical practices and robust theological education (Perry, 2021). This section explores two critical strategies: hermeneutical guidelines for responsible interpretation and the role of theological education and pastoral training. Together, these strategies provide a framework for preachers to

engage faithfully with Scripture while equipping congregations with a balanced and comprehensive understanding of God's Word.

2.6.1 Hermeneutical Guidelines for Responsible Interpretation

2.6.1.a Understanding the Context of Scripture

A foundational principle for responsible interpretation is the understanding of the literary, historical, and theological context of biblical passages (Sommers, 2007). Preachers must consider how a verse or passage fits within the immediate text, the broader biblical narrative, and the historical circumstances in which it was written. For instance, Jeremiah 29:11 is often quoted to highlight God's promises of prosperity; however, it is more accurately understood within the context of Israel's exile, where it reassures suffering people of God's long-term faithfulness despite their immediate hardships.

Contextual analysis includes identifying the literary context, such as the genre (e.g., poetry, narrative, epistle), rhetorical devices, and surrounding verses or chapters (Hu, 2022). It also examines the historical context and the text's cultural, political, and social background. Additionally, it includes interpreting individual passages within the framework of the entire biblical canon to maintain theological coherence.

2.6.1.b Engaging with the Original Languages

Another critical hermeneutical guideline is engaging with the original languages of Scripture—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek (Kinsella, 2006). Understanding the nuances of the original text can clarify meanings that may be obscured or oversimplified in translation. For example, the Greek word "agape" (love) in the New Testament

conveys a selfless, sacrificial love, which is distinct from "philia" (brotherly affection) or "eros" (romantic love) (Osborne, 1996). Preachers who invest in language studies can more accurately interpret key terms and avoid misrepresenting biblical concepts.

2.6.1.c Applying the Principle of Harmony

The principle of harmony asserts that Scripture does not contradict itself and must be interpreted as a unified whole (Davidson, 2004). Preachers should compare and reconcile complex or seemingly contradictory passages to ensure a balanced understanding. For example, Ephesians 2:8-9 (salvation by grace through faith) and James 2:26 (faith without works is dead) are complementary rather than contradictory when viewed within the broader context of faith and works in the Christian life.

2.6.1.d Prioritising Expository Preaching

Expository preaching, which systematically works through entire books or sections of the Bible, serves as an effective antidote to selective preaching. This approach encourages preachers to address both encouraging and challenging passages, ensuring that the whole counsel of God is proclaimed (Whiston, 1952). By methodically engaging with Scripture, preachers could model responsible interpretation and expose their congregations to the richness and complexity of God's Word.

2.6.1.e Recognising and Addressing Personal Bias

Hermeneutical integrity requires preachers to be self-aware and intentional about addressing their own biases (Rogers, 2023). Cognitive tendencies such as confirmation bias (favouring interpretations that align with pre-existing beliefs) and the availability heuristic (relying on familiar or easily remembered texts) can skew an

interpretation. Preachers can counteract these tendencies by seeking diverse theological perspectives, engaging in collaborative sermon preparation, and remaining accountable to trusted mentors or peers.

2.6.1.f Utilising Hermeneutical Resources

Modern tools and resources, such as commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and theological journals, provide valuable insights for responsible interpretation. Preachers should prioritise reputable, scholarly resources that offer well-researched exegesis and historical analysis (Paul, 2022). By consulting a range of voices, including those from different traditions or cultural contexts, preachers can develop a more nuanced and balanced understanding of Scripture.

2.6.2 The Role of Theological Education and Pastoral Training

2.6.2.a Foundational Training in Theology and Hermeneutics

Theological education is essential for equipping preachers to interpret and communicate Scripture responsibly (Trentham, 2023). Seminaries and Bible colleges offer foundational training in key areas such as hermeneutics, biblical studies, and systematic theology. These courses help preachers develop the skills necessary to engage deeply with Scripture, navigate complex theological issues, and address the challenges of selective preaching.

For example, courses in hermeneutics teach students to analyse texts using historical-critical, literary, and canonical methods. Systematic theology provides a framework for understanding how individual doctrines fit within the larger biblical narrative. Preachers

trained in these disciplines are better equipped to approach Scripture holistically, avoiding the pitfalls of cherry-picking verses.

2.6.2.b Ongoing Professional Development

Beyond formal education, ongoing professional development is crucial for maintaining theological and pastoral competence (Handley, 2024). Workshops, conferences, and continuing education programs inform preachers about current theological debates, cultural trends, and advances in biblical scholarship (Milton, 2022). For instance, a seminar on interpreting Old Testament law in light of the New Testament can offer fresh insights into challenging passages, such as dietary laws or capital punishment. Continuing education also fosters humility and intellectual growth, encouraging preachers to remain lifelong learners who are open to refining their understanding of Scripture and ministry practices.

2.6.2.c Mentorship and Peer Accountability

Mentorship and peer accountability are invaluable components of pastoral training (Wakeman, 2012). Experienced mentors guide preachers in navigating the complexities of biblical interpretation and sermon preparation, offering constructive feedback and practical advice. Similarly, peer accountability groups provide a supportive environment for discussing challenges, sharing insights, and refining preaching practices.

For instance, preachers might collaborate with colleagues to review sermon outlines, ensuring messages are theologically sound and contextually relevant (Hussey, 2015).

This collaborative process enhances the quality of preaching and fosters a culture of mutual learning and spiritual growth.

2.6.2.d Contextual Training for Contemporary Issues

Theological education must also address the unique challenges of preaching in a rapidly changing world. Contextual training equips preachers to apply Scripture to contemporary issues such as racial justice, mental health, and environmental stewardship while maintaining fidelity to the biblical text (Oji & Powell, 2024). For example, ethics and public theology courses enable preachers to navigate the intersection of Scripture and societal concerns, allowing them to address these topics with wisdom and integrity.

2.6.2.e Emphasising Spiritual Formation

Effective theological education prioritises intellectual development and spiritual formation (Wang et al., 2023). Preachers are not merely scholars; they are spiritual leaders called to embody the truths they proclaim (Hove, 2023). Training programs should emphasise disciplines such as prayer, meditation, and personal accountability, fostering a deep reliance on the Holy Spirit to guide interpreting and communicating God's Word.

2.6.2.f Integrating Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is vital to pastoral training in an increasingly globalised world. Preachers must be equipped to understand and engage with diverse cultural contexts, recognising how social dynamics and cultural narratives shape both the interpretation of Scripture and the reception of sermons (Stevenson, 2009). Training programs

incorporating cross-cultural studies and contextual theology prepare preachers to navigate these dynamics thoughtfully and effectively.

Addressing the challenges of selective preaching requires a multifaceted approach that combines hermeneutical rigour with comprehensive theological education. By adhering to sound hermeneutical guidelines, preachers can ensure that their interpretations are faithful to the text and reflect the broader biblical narrative. Theological education and pastoral training provide the knowledge, skills, and spiritual grounding necessary for preachers to engage with Scripture responsibly and communicate its truths effectively. Together, these strategies equip preachers to uphold the integrity of God's Word, foster spiritual growth within their congregations, and navigate the complexities of ministry in a modern context.

2.7 Identified Gaps in Knowledge

Despite significant research in biblical interpretation, homiletics, and hermeneutics, notable gaps remain regarding selective preaching and its theological, ethical, and practical implications. These gaps limit the church's ability to effectively address the challenges of selective verse usage and highlight the need for further research to maintain theological integrity in preaching. This section outlines critical areas with an incomplete understanding of the causes, effects, and solutions for selective preaching practices.

2.7.1 Limited Research on Psychological Influences in Preaching

Psychological factors, such as cognitive biases, significantly affect how preachers interpret and present Scripture (Korteling et al., 2023); however, research in this area

is limited. Biases like confirmation bias and the availability heuristic can distort interpretation, yet their influence on selective preaching needs further examination. Current studies focus broadly on decision-making without detailing how these biases impact sermon preparation and delivery. More research is needed to help preachers recognise and mitigate these biases and to understand their effects on congregations.

2.7.2 Inadequate Examination of Sociocultural Influences

Sociocultural dynamics influencing selective preaching (Dreyer, 2009) have not been thoroughly studied, especially in diverse global contexts. While cultural narratives and congregational expectations shape preaching practices, the specific contributions of these factors to selective verse usage remain unclear. For example, in prosperity gospel movements, cultural values around wealth often focus on verses about blessings, neglecting teachings on sacrifice. There is little substantive research on how these cultural forces interact with theological frameworks. Additionally, how cultural norms in collectivist societies influence selective preaching practices is also understudied.

2.7.3 Limited Empirical Studies on Congregational Impact

Although the theoretical implications of selective preaching (Castillow, 2016)—like doctrinal incoherence and spiritual stagnation—are known, empirical studies on its effects on congregational life are scarce. Few studies explore how selective preaching shapes congregants' theological understanding or spiritual engagement. While it is suggested that cherry-picking verses leads to theological confusion, little data supports these claims. Conducting surveys, focus groups, or longitudinal studies could provide valuable insights into congregants' experiences.

2.7.4 Gaps in Strategies for Addressing Selective Preaching

While hermeneutical guidelines and theological education are essential tools for combating selective preaching (Ortega et al., 2010), specific implementation strategies are underdeveloped. While expository preaching is often suggested as a remedy, practical frameworks for transitioning from selective styles to expository preaching are lacking. Identifying adequate resources and training for preachers with limited exegesis training is crucial. Furthermore, strategies for fostering accountability within church leadership (Osisioma, 2013)—like peer reviews, collaborative sermon preparation, or congregational feedback—are underexplored. Research into implementing these practices across various denominational and cultural contexts could provide actionable solutions against selective preaching.

2.7.5 Lack of Case Studies on Sectarian Movements

Selective preaching is common in sectarian movements and exclusive religious groups (Knudsen et al., 1978), but detailed case studies are scarce. Groups like the INC often use selective verses to support claims of exclusivity and superiority. Although this practice faces criticism (McKay & Whitehouse, 2015), there is insufficient analysis of how it strengthens sectarian identity and affects congregational dynamics. Conducting detailed case studies could illuminate the methods used in selective preaching and the social and psychological factors that influence it. This research is essential for developing strategies to address theological distortions caused by exclusivist interpretations of Scripture.

2.7.6 Insufficient Exploration of Modern Media's Role

Today, sermons are widely shared through online platforms, podcasts, and social media, increasing the reach of selective preaching (O'Lynn, 2023). However, research on how digital media affects these practices is limited. For instance, short sermon clips or inspirational posts often emphasise isolated verses without their broader context, contributing to the normalisation of cherry-picking Scripture.

Investigating how digital media shapes preaching and congregational engagement is critical. This research could explore how online content reinforces specific theological trends and how preachers can use media responsibly to encourage holistic biblical teaching.

2.7.7 Minimal Integration of Psychological, Sociological, and Theological Approaches

Current studies on selective preaching tend to focus on theological or pastoral aspects, lacking integration of psychological and sociological insights. A comprehensive approach is necessary to understand the complexities of selective preaching, influenced by cognitive biases, cultural dynamics, and institutional pressures.

Interdisciplinary research can enhance understanding by examining the interplay of these factors and proposing integrated strategies for promoting theological integrity. For instance, combining cognitive psychology with hermeneutics could help preachers address biases, while sociological insights could guide efforts to cultivate critical engagement with Scripture.

The lack of knowledge regarding selective preaching highlights the complexity of the issue and the need for further research across various disciplines. Addressing these gaps will require empirical studies on psychological and sociocultural influences, specific case studies, and practical frameworks for solutions. Filling these gaps could create effective strategies to combat selective preaching and promote a coherent engagement with Scripture in the church.

2.8 Conclusion

The literature review emphasises the evolution of biblical interpretation and its influence on preaching practices. From the Early Church Fathers to contemporary interpretative methods, each period has enriched our understanding of Scripture, highlighting the necessity of balancing historical, literary, and theological contexts.

Expository preaching, grounded in the authority and clarity of Scripture, is a powerful tool for spiritual formation. It ensures that sermons are both theologically sound and contextually relevant. However, the issues of selective verse usage—shaped by cognitive biases and sociocultural dynamics—highlight the importance of responsible hermeneutics and comprehensive theological education.

To address these challenges, there must be a commitment to rigorous exegesis, ongoing professional development, and a holistic approach to sermon preparation incorporating diverse perspectives and cultural competence. By adhering to these principles, preachers can effectively communicate the transformative power of Scripture, fostering a more inclusive and spiritually mature church community.

CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design: Qualitative Design and Thematic Focus

This study employs a qualitative research design with a thematic focus (Naeem et al., 2023), providing a strong framework for exploring the challenges and strategies related to selective preaching. This approach emphasises a deep and rich understanding of the phenomena under investigation, specifically how preachers interpret Scripture, the factors influencing selective preaching, and the effects on congregations. A qualitative design is particularly suitable for examining complex, context-sensitive (Silverio et al., 2022) issues like hermeneutics and preaching practices, as it reveals nuanced insights that quantitative methods may overlook.

Qualitative research prioritises understanding experiences, meanings, and processes from the perspectives of those involved. It allows for an in-depth exploration of selective preaching by analysing doctrines, sermons, theological frameworks, and contextual factors that shape preaching practices (Fossey et al., 2002). Unlike quantitative methods, which focus on measurable variables, qualitative research seeks to uncover patterns, themes, and underlying factors (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2024). This makes it ideal for investigating theological and hermeneutical practices. This design permits examining how preachers interpret and apply Scripture in their sermons, how selective verse usage manifests in different denominational or cultural settings, and how congregants perceive and respond to such preaching. The exploratory nature of this approach is especially valuable for studying the multifaceted issue of selective preaching, which is influenced by theological, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions.

The thematic focus of the study ensures that recurring patterns and ideas are identified and analysed, allowing for a comprehensive examination of selective preaching and its implications. Thematic analysis will be applied to data gathered from various sources, including textual analysis of sermons, focused case studies, literature reviews, and secondary data. Sermons will be scrutinised to identify patterns of selective verse usage, such as how verses are interpreted, whether they are presented in context, and how they align with broader theological themes. Case studies, such as an analysis of the INC, will provide a detailed look at how selective preaching manifests in practice and its impact on doctrinal coherence and congregational dynamics. The literature review will engage with existing theological and pastoral scholarship, contextualising findings and identifying gaps in understanding. At the same time, secondary data will include theological writings and denominational statements that offer additional insights into preaching practices.

This research design includes several key features. Contextual sensitivity ensures that preaching practices are analysed within their specific denominational, cultural, and historical contexts, capturing the unique factors influencing selective verse usage in diverse environments. A holistic perspective considers the interplay between theological interpretation, psychological influences, and sociocultural dynamics, providing comprehensive insights into the causes and consequences of selective preaching. Additionally, qualitative research's flexibility and iterative nature facilitate the adaptation of methods and focus as new findings emerge (Aspers & Corte, 2019), ensuring that the study remains responsive to the topic's complexities.

The research process involves several steps. First, data collection will include a systematic review of theological literature, an in-depth analysis of sermons from various contexts, and selecting and examining relevant case studies. Next, data analysis will employ thematic analysis to code and categorise textual data, identify recurring themes, and analyse patterns of selective verse usage concerning theological, psychological, and sociocultural factors. Finally, the interpretation and synthesis of findings will involve drawing connections between themes and proposing practical strategies for addressing selective preaching and promoting theological integrity.

The qualitative design presents several strengths. It offers deep insights into the complexities of selective preaching, capturing nuances that quantitative methods may miss. The study's contextual relevance ensures that its findings apply to real-world preaching practices, while the iterative nature of qualitative research allows for adaptability and responsiveness to emerging insights. However, the design also has limitations, including the potential for researcher subjectivity and the context-specific nature of findings, which may limit generalisability. To mitigate these limitations, the study will employ rigorous methods, such as triangulation, to ensure the validity and reliability of its conclusions (Arias Valencia, 2022).

3.2 Data Collection

The data collection process for this study employs three interconnected methods: an extensive literature review, a detailed textual analysis of sermons, and the selection and examination of case studies. Together, these methods create a strong and multifaceted framework for investigating the practice of selective preaching, its

theological and ethical implications, and potential strategies for maintaining hermeneutical integrity. Each method plays a vital role in ensuring that the study's findings are rooted in both theoretical knowledge and practical realities.

3.2.1 Literature Review as the Primary Source of Data

The literature review serves as the primary data source, establishing a foundation for the research by engaging with a wide range of scholarly works in biblical studies, hermeneutics, homiletics, and pastoral theology. This review draws from theological texts, academic commentaries, peer-reviewed journal articles, and historical analyses to contextualise selective preaching within the broader biblical interpretation and expository preaching discourse. The literature review systematically identifies existing patterns, debates, and gaps in the field (Snyder, 2019). It addresses key issues such as the historical evolution of selective verse usage, its theological consequences, and current strategies to counteract it. By synthesising this wealth of knowledge, the review contextualises the study's research questions and highlights areas that require further exploration, such as the psychological and sociocultural dimensions of selective preaching. This comprehensive engagement with the academic landscape ensures that the study is informed by rigorous scholarship, positioning its findings within ongoing theological and pastoral conversations.

3.2.2 Textual Analysis of Sermons

The textual analysis (Kiger & Varpio, 2020) of sermons constitutes the second major component of the data collection process, offering a practical lens through which to examine selective preaching. This method systematically evaluates sermons from various denominational, cultural, and theological contexts, focusing on the

interpretative methods employed by preachers. The analysis aims to identify patterns of selective verse usage, particularly how certain verses are emphasised or isolated to support specific theological themes. At the same time, other relevant passages are overlooked or omitted. Key aspects of the analysis include evaluating whether verses are presented in their literary, historical, and canonical contexts, determining the degree of exegetical rigour applied, and assessing how these factors influence the coherence and theological soundness of the sermon.

The sermons selected for analysis reflect a range of preaching styles and theological emphases, providing a diverse sample for study. These sermons may address popular theological topics, such as prosperity theology, exclusivity in salvation, or social justice, which often lend themselves to selective interpretation. For instance, a sermon on prosperity might overemphasise verses such as Malachi 3:10 and Jeremiah 29:11 while neglecting passages on stewardship, sacrificial giving, or the dangers of materialism (e.g., Matthew 6:19-21 or 1 Timothy 6:10). The textual analysis also investigates how selective preaching impacts congregants' understanding of Scripture, including potential distortions in their theological worldview and spiritual practices. By analysing sermons across diverse contexts, this method provides practical insights into how selective verse usage manifests and its broader implications for congregational life and theological coherence.

3.2.3 Selection and Examination of Case Studies

The selection and examination of case studies (Petrie et al., 2024) form the third pillar of the data collection, allowing for an in-depth investigation of real-world examples of selective preaching and its effects. Case studies provide a focused approach to

understanding how selective verse usage operates within specific communities or movements, offering concrete evidence of its theological and practical consequences.

For this study, the INC is the key case study due to its reliance on selective scriptural interpretation to assert exclusivist doctrines and ecclesial identity. Analysing INC's preaching practices involves examining their sermons, doctrinal statements, and congregational dynamics to understand how selective verse usage shapes their theological framework and influences member behaviour. For instance, the study may explore how verses like John 10:16 and Acts 20:28 are used to promote claims of exclusivity while disregarding broader biblical themes of unity and inclusivity (e.g., Galatians 3:28 or Ephesians 4:4-6).

The case study approach may also include comparative analyses of other groups or movements where selective preaching is prevalent, such as prosperity gospel churches or sectarian movements with strong doctrinal emphases. These comparative case studies offer valuable insights into the diversity of selective preaching practices, highlighting common patterns, unique expressions, and varying impacts across different theological and cultural contexts. They also enhance our understanding of how selective verse usage affects ecclesiology, congregational cohesion, and the broader witness of the church.

This triad of methods—literature review, textual analysis of sermons, and case study examination—creates a comprehensive and interconnected framework for data collection. The literature review establishes the theoretical foundation and identifies gaps in existing knowledge, while the textual analysis of sermons reveals practical

patterns and implications of selective preaching. The case studies provide detailed, real-world examples that anchor the study in concrete contexts and illustrate the theological and pastoral challenges associated with selective verse usage. By integrating these methods, the data collection process ensures a thorough and multidimensional understanding of selective preaching, enabling the study to propose informed and actionable strategies for promoting theological integrity in preaching.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis process for this study employs a combination of thematic analysis and contextual and hermeneutical evaluations to thoroughly explore the practice of selective preaching, its underlying patterns, and its theological and pastoral implications. These methods ensure a systematic, nuanced, and rigorous examination of the collected data, allowing for the identification of recurring issues, interpretive trends, and the broader effects of selective verse usage on preaching practices and congregational life.

3.3.1 Thematic Analysis for Identifying Patterns

The thematic analysis serves as the primary analytic method for this study, providing a structured framework for coding and categorising data to identify significant patterns and themes. This process is iterative, examining data from sermons, case studies, and literature for recurring motifs related to selective preaching. Key themes include the isolation of specific verses to support ideological agendas, overemphasising certain theological doctrines (e.g., prosperity or exclusivity), and neglecting passages that challenge or complicate the preacher's narrative.

The thematic analysis addresses the following questions:

1. How do preachers select specific verses for their sermons?

This question examines the criteria or motivations behind choosing certain texts, including denominational traditions, cultural influences, or personal biases.

2. What theological or doctrinal frameworks emerge from selective preaching?

This question seeks to identify whether selective verses align with broader theological trends, such as prosperity theology or sectarian exclusivity.

3. What are the recurring ethical and pastoral concerns?

This question investigates how selective preaching affects the preacher's credibility, congregational trust, and the holistic understanding of Scripture among congregants.

Additionally, this method examines variations across different contexts, such as denominational or cultural differences in selective preaching practices. For instance, the analysis may reveal how prosperity-focused sermons in affluent communities differ from exclusivity-driven sermons in sectarian movements. By uncovering these patterns, thematic analysis provides a robust understanding of the factors that drive selective preaching and its practical and theological outcomes.

3.3.2 Contextual and Hermeneutical Evaluations of Sermons

Combining thematic analysis with contextual and hermeneutical assessments can help evaluate sermons' theological integrity and interpretive soundness. This process involves carefully examining how preachers engage with biblical texts, focusing on their adherence to proper hermeneutical principles and the context of the texts.

3.3.2.a Literary and Canonical Context

Evaluating the literary context involves analysing whether verses are interpreted about surrounding passages, their genre, and structure. For example, a verse from the Psalms should be understood within its poetic and devotional framework, while a verse from an epistle requires attention to its argumentative and theological structure. Additionally, assessing canonical context involves determining whether individual verses are harmonised with the broader narrative and theological themes of Scripture. Selective preaching often neglects these layers of meaning, leading to fragmented or distorted interpretations.

3.3.2.b Historical and Cultural Context

Sermons also need to be evaluated based on their consideration of the historical and cultural setting in which the biblical texts were written. This involves exploring whether preachers address socio-political conditions, their audience, and the specific issues the text discusses. For instance, interpreting Jeremiah 29:11 without acknowledging the historical context of Israel's exile risks misrepresenting its original intent. By placing texts within their historical framework, this contextual evaluation ensures a more accurate understanding of their messages.

3.3.2.c Exegetical Methods and Hermeneutical Integrity

Hermeneutical evaluations focus on assessing the preacher's exegetical methods, including using original languages, historical-critical tools, and theological frameworks. This involves examining how preachers derive meaning from the text and whether their interpretations align with sound hermeneutical principles. For example, sermons

that rely heavily on proof-texting—using isolated verses to support pre-existing arguments—are scrutinised for failing to engage with the text's complexity and depth.

3.3.2.d Faithfulness to the Biblical Narrative

Hermeneutical evaluations also consider whether sermons maintain theological coherence by presenting the whole counsel of Scripture. Selective preaching often isolates themes such as blessing, judgment, or exclusivity without situating them within the overarching narrative of redemption, grace, and God's kingdom. Evaluating sermons for their reflection of this narrative helps ensure that their theological messages remain faithful to the Bible's holistic teaching.

3.3.2.e Combining Thematic and Contextual Approaches

By integrating thematic analysis with contextual and hermeneutical evaluations, this study adopts a comprehensive approach to data analysis. The thematic analysis identifies recurring issues and patterns, such as the prioritisation of certain doctrines or the omission of challenging biblical themes. Meanwhile, contextual and hermeneutical evaluations assess the theological and interpretive quality of the sermons under review. For instance, thematic analysis might reveal an emphasis on prosperity in sermons. At the same time, the hermeneutical evaluation would assess whether the cited verses are interpreted in context and aligned with the Bible's broader teachings on wealth and stewardship.

This dual approach ensures that findings are descriptive and evaluative, providing a nuanced understanding of how selective preaching occurs and its implications for congregational life. It also informs the development of practical strategies to address

selective preaching, ensuring that solutions are grounded in a robust analysis of both patterns and interpretive practices.

The data analysis process for this study combines thematic analysis and contextual evaluations to reveal the patterns, factors, and theological implications of selective preaching. Thematic analysis provides insights into recurring issues such as ideological biases and doctrinal distortions, while contextual and hermeneutical evaluations assess the interpretive soundness of sermons. Together, these methods offer a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities of selective verse usage and developing actionable strategies to promote responsible preaching and theological integrity. This integrated approach ensures that the findings are both grounded in rigorous analysis and applicable to real-world preaching contexts.

3.4 Theological and Hermeneutical Framework

This study's theological and hermeneutical framework is built on two foundational pillars: applying historical-critical methods and integrating systematic theology principles. These frameworks ensure that the study's approach to preaching, interpretation, and hermeneutics remains rigorous and faithful to the biblical text, promoting theological integrity and responsible biblical engagement. By combining these approaches, the study aims to uphold the full scope of Scripture and prevent the distortions associated with selective preaching.

3.4.1 Application of Historical-Critical Methods

The historical-critical method is a scholarly approach that focuses on understanding biblical texts' historical, cultural, and linguistic context (Brettler et al., 2012). This

method is essential in addressing selective preaching, as it ensures that biblical passages are interpreted within their original contexts, preventing their meaning from being distorted by modern theological or ideological biases. The historical-critical method includes several key components:

3.4.1.a Textual Criticism

Textual criticism (Hamidović David, 2020) involves analysing and comparing ancient manuscripts of biblical texts to determine the most accurate rendering of the original writings. In the context of selective preaching, this ensures that preachers work with reliable texts and do not rely on later or biased translations that could obscure the original meaning of Scripture. This approach is beneficial when examining passages that may have been altered or misinterpreted over time. By focusing on the earliest manuscripts, preachers can avoid faulty translations that might promote selective or ideological interpretations.

3.4.1.b Historical Contextualisation

Historical contextualisation is about understanding the social, political, and cultural circumstances in which a biblical text was written (Vaughn, 2019). This understanding is crucial in preventing the misapplication of Scripture in contemporary contexts. For instance, many passages frequently cited for political or moral agendas must be understood within the specific historical and cultural backdrop of ancient Israel or the early Christian church. Sermons that misapply texts by ignoring their historical context—such as using Old Testament texts about Israel's covenant to justify contemporary political ideologies—can lead to theological distortions. By applying historical-critical methods, preachers can engage with the deeper historical context of

biblical passages, ensuring that their interpretations are not anachronistic or out of sync with the text's original intent.

3.4.1.c Linguistic and Literary Analysis

Historical-critical methods also involve analysing the original languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) to understand the meaning of words, phrases, and grammatical structures better. This analysis is critical when preachers rely on translations that may not fully capture the depth of the original text. For example, the Greek word agape (love) carries distinct connotations compared to other words for love, such as philia (brotherly love) or eros (romantic love) (Osborne, 1996). Understanding these distinctions helps prevent the misinterpretation of key theological concepts. Similarly, analysing the genre of biblical texts—narrative, poetry, prophecy, or epistle—helps preachers avoid misapplying texts by reading them in inappropriate genres, such as treating symbolic prophecies as literal historical predictions.

By grounding the interpretation of Scripture in its historical and linguistic contexts, the historical-critical method provides a vital safeguard against the selective use of verses that can distort the text's original meaning and theological message. This method allows preachers to maintain fidelity to the Bible's authentic message and to avoid the pitfalls of proof-texting, where verses are taken out of context to support personal or ideological agendas.

3.4.2 Integration of Systematic Theology Principles

Integrating systematic theology principles is essential for accurately interpreting Scripture within its historical and linguistic contexts (Lillback, 2023). While historical-

critical methods focus on understanding the original meaning of biblical texts, systematic theology helps us grasp the overarching theological themes across Scripture, ensuring that individual passages are harmonised with the broader biblical narrative. This integration allows for synthesising diverse biblical teachings into coherent doctrines, ensuring that preachers' interpretations align with the whole counsel of God's Word. The following principles are vital for addressing selective preaching theologically:

3.4.2.a The Unity and Coherence of Scripture

A fundamental principle of systematic theology is the unity and coherence of Scripture (DeHart, 2024). This principle claims that the Bible is a unified whole despite being written by various authors over centuries, and it clearly communicates God's redemptive plan. Selective preaching often overlooks this unity by emphasising individual verses or themes while neglecting others that may challenge or complicate a narrow theological agenda. Systematic theology teaches that any doctrine or theological theme must be consistent with the entire biblical narrative. For instance, while prosperity theology may highlight verses that promise material blessings, systematic theology reminds preachers to consider the broader biblical context, which includes teachings on humility, sacrifice, and the dangers of wealth (Matthew 6:24; Luke 18:24-25). By interpreting individual passages in light of the entire biblical narrative, systematic theology safeguards against the fragmentation characteristic of selective preaching.

3.4.2.b Christocentric Interpretation

Systematic theology emphasises a Christocentric approach to interpreting Scripture, where the person and work of Jesus Christ serve as the central focus of the Bible's message (Puosi, 2006). This principle asserts that both the Old and New Testaments should be read through the lens of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. For example, a preacher who highlights the Old Testament's promises of land and blessings without acknowledging their fulfilment in Christ risks misunderstanding the more profound spiritual significance of those promises. Selective preaching can easily overlook the completion of the Law and the Prophets in the person of Jesus, leading to an incomplete or distorted theological framework. By using Christ as the interpretive key, systematic theology ensures that Scripture is understood in its fullest sense, telling a unified story of redemption that culminates in the gospel.

3.4.2.c Doctrine of Scripture and Biblical Authority

Systematic theology affirms the doctrine of Scripture's inerrancy and authority, asserting that the Bible, in its original manuscripts, is entirely trustworthy and authoritative for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16-17). A systematic approach to preaching treats Scripture with utmost respect and authority, preventing the distortion of biblical texts through selective use. Preachers must avoid treating Scripture simply as a tool to support personal views or agendas; instead, they should allow the full scope of biblical revelation to shape their theology and practice. Selective preaching often arises when preachers use Scripture as a source of isolated "proof texts" to validate personal or denominational positions. Systematic theology requires preachers to read Scripture in its entirety, acknowledging that every text contributes to developing a consistent and coherent theological system.

3.4.2.d Theological Integrity and Ethical Responsibility

Systematic theology also emphasises the ethical responsibility of preachers to handle Scripture accurately and responsibly (Paddison, 2011). The Bible is not just a theological document but also an ethical guide for Christian living. When preachers engage in selective preaching, they risk promoting a distorted view of Christian ethics, where personal agendas or cultural preferences take precedence over the moral and spiritual imperatives of the gospel. By integrating ethical considerations into their theological framework, preachers are reminded that their responsibility is to teach sound doctrine and guide their congregations in living out that doctrine in a way that reflects God's character. This principle aligns with the overall goal of this study—ensuring that preaching remains faithful to Scripture's teachings and contributes to the spiritual formation of the congregation.

This study's theological and hermeneutical framework combines historical-critical methods with systematic theology principles to ensure that selective preaching is approached with interpretive accuracy and theological integrity. Historical-critical methods provide the tools for understanding the text's original meaning and context, preventing the distortion of Scripture through isolated interpretations.

3.5 Limitations

While this study aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced examination of selective preaching, several limitations are inherent to the research design, data collection methods, and analysis process. These limitations must be acknowledged as they may affect the study's findings' scope, generalisability, and applicability. Addressing these limitations helps ensure that the conclusions drawn are viewed

within the context of the study's parameters and provides a foundation for further research in this area. These limitations will be discussed below.

3.5.1 Context-Specific Focus

One of the primary limitations of this study is its context-specific focus. While the research will include a variety of denominational and cultural settings through the analysis of sermons and case studies, the conclusions drawn may be more applicable to particular contexts rather than universally generalisable. For example, the study may focus heavily on specific groups or movements, such as the INC or prosperity gospel movements, which employ selective preaching practices. While these case studies provide valuable insights, they may not fully represent the diversity of preaching practices across the entire Christian church. Denominational variations, theological nuances, and regional differences could influence how selective preaching is understood and practised. Thus, while the study will offer broader theological insights, the specific findings may be more relevant to particular contexts or communities rather than universally applicable to all forms of preaching.

3.5.2 Limited Sample Size of Sermons and Case Studies

Another limitation is the limited sample size of sermons and case studies. While efforts will be made to select a diverse range of sermons from various denominations, cultural contexts, and theological perspectives, the number of sermons analysed may still be insufficient to represent the full range of preaching practices globally. Furthermore, the selection of case studies, such as the INC, may only provide a snapshot of how selective preaching operates within specific movements and may not capture the full spectrum of selective verse usage across different sects or denominations. The

limitations in sample size could affect the breadth of insights and reduce the generalisability of findings. Additionally, the context of each sermon and case study will be highly specific, which means that while valuable patterns may emerge, they may not be fully reflective of broader church-wide trends. Future studies could expand the scope of case studies and sermon analysis to provide a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon.

3.5.3 Subjectivity in Sermon Analysis

Sermon analysis is inherently subjective, as it involves interpreting the preacher's intent, theological perspective, and hermeneutical approach. This subjectivity may influence the consistency of the findings and the interpretation of the extent and impact of selective preaching in some instances. Nevertheless, the subjective nature of interpreting preaching practices remains a limitation that could introduce some variation in the findings.

3.5.4 Theological and Doctrinal Biases

Given the nature of the study, which deals with theological interpretation and biblical exegesis, there is the potential for theological and doctrinal biases to influence both the data analysis and interpretation of findings. Since the study will engage with specific theological traditions (e.g., evangelical, reformed, or prosperity theology), the interpretive frameworks applied may influence how selective preaching is understood and critiqued. This is particularly pertinent in case studies like the INC, where exclusive theological positions may colour how selective preaching is perceived and analysed. The study will employ theological reflection to address this limitation and ensure the analysis remains grounded in established and orthodox Christian doctrine.

3.5.5 Lack of Longitudinal Data

A significant limitation of the study is the lack of longitudinal data on the effects of selective preaching. The study will analyse current practices and their immediate theological and congregational impacts. However, it will not provide a long-term view of how selective preaching influences church growth, theological understanding, or spiritual formation over time. Without longitudinal data, it is difficult to assess whether the effects of selective preaching persist or evolve in congregational life. For example, the long-term impact of prosperity gospel preaching on congregational faith or the doctrinal shifts that may result from a continued emphasis on exclusivist interpretations are beyond the scope of this study. While this study aims to provide valuable insights, future research could benefit from longitudinal studies to assess the sustained effects of selective preaching practices on congregational belief and behaviour.

3.5.6 Challenges in Evaluating Preacher Intent

A key challenge in evaluating selective preaching is the difficulty discerning the preacher's intent behind selecting specific verses. While it is possible to analyse a sermon's theological themes and patterns, determining whether a preacher cherry-picks verses to support a personal or ideological agenda is not always straightforward. Preachers may justify using certain verses with varying theological or exegetical explanations, complicating the analysis. Additionally, preachers may not always be aware of the biases they bring to their interpretations, making it harder to distinguish between intentional selective preaching and unintentional misinterpretation. This limitation is mitigated by triangulating data from sermon content, theological frameworks, and case studies, but it remains a challenge to fully understand the motivations behind selective verse usage.

3.5.7 The Dynamic Nature of Preaching Practices

Preaching practices evolve over time, and today's theological trends and methodologies may not fully capture the developments in preaching that emerge in the future. This study focuses on current preaching practices, but changes in the cultural, theological, and technological landscape (e.g., the rise of online preaching platforms or shifts in denominational teachings) may alter how Scripture is interpreted and preached in the future. As a result, the findings of this study may be limited in their ability to account for these changes. They may not fully address how selective preaching will evolve in response to shifts in global Christianity or societal norms. Future studies may need to explore the dynamic, shifting nature of preaching practices and how selective preaching adapts to these changes.

The limitations of this study, including its context-specific focus, limited sample size, subjectivity in sermon analysis, potential theological biases, and lack of longitudinal data, must be acknowledged when interpreting the results. While these limitations may affect the scope and generalisability of the findings, they do not diminish the study's overall value in addressing the problem of selective preaching. By acknowledging these limitations, the study provides a framework for future research to expand and refine the exploration of selective preaching, its causes, and its theological consequences. The findings from this study will significantly contribute to the ongoing discourse on biblical interpretation and preaching practices, helping promote theological integrity and responsible engagement with Scripture in the church.

3.6 Conclusion

This study utilises a qualitative research design with a thematic focus to examine the challenges and strategies associated with selective preaching. By combining a literature review, textual analysis of sermons, and case studies, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how selective verse usage manifests and its implications for congregational life and theological coherence.

The thematic analysis identifies recurring patterns and themes, while contextual and hermeneutical evaluations ensure the theological integrity of the sermons being reviewed. The study's framework integrates historical-critical methods and principles of systematic theology to maintain fidelity to the biblical text and prevent distortions related to selective preaching.

Despite limitations such as a context-specific focus, a limited sample size, and the potential for subjectivity, the study offers valuable insights into promoting responsible preaching and theological integrity. Future research could build on these findings by incorporating longitudinal data and exploring the dynamic nature of preaching practices in response to cultural and theological shifts.

CHAPTER IV – CASE STUDIES AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Case Study 1: Selective Verses in Sermons on Social and Ethical Issues

4.1.1 The Use of Scripture in Addressing Social Justice

Sermons that address social justice are a prominent area where the selective use of Scripture often emerges. This happens when preachers emphasise specific biblical passages that advocate for justice, mercy, and care for the oppressed while downplaying or omitting other significant themes within the Bible that offer a more comprehensive understanding of justice. Preachers frequently highlight verses such as Isaiah 1:17 ("Learn to do well: seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge for the fatherless, defend the widow") and Amos 5:24 ("But judgment shall be revealed as water, and justice as a mighty torrent"). These passages are commonly invoked to inspire action and foster awareness about racial equality, poverty alleviation, and the empowerment of marginalised communities. They are foundational to the biblical call to pursue justice, make right the wrongs of society, and care for those who are vulnerable and oppressed.

However, a selective approach to these scriptures may fail to provide a full, balanced view of what biblical justice truly entails. By focusing exclusively on these verses, preachers can unintentionally create a truncated understanding of justice that emphasises societal reform and collective action while neglecting the profound spiritual aspects of biblical justice. The Bible teaches that true justice involves both rectifying social injustices and addressing the deeper, personal need for repentance, reconciliation, and spiritual transformation. This gap can lead to a skewed theology that separates justice from personal holiness and moral responsibility.

For instance, verses like Isaiah 1:17 and Amos 5:24 provide powerful calls for social justice. However, they should not be understood in isolation from other key texts that challenge individuals to transform and repent before God. For example, Micah 6:8 adds an important dimension to biblical justice: "I will shew thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requireth of thee: Verily, to do judgment, and to love mercy, and to walk solicitous with thy God". This verse highlights that justice is not only a societal concern but also a deeply personal one that involves walking humbly with God, loving mercy, and pursuing personal holiness. Justice, in this sense, is as much about individual transformation as it is about societal change. Preaching on social justice that ignores personal holiness risks creating a moral dichotomy that allows individuals and churches to support social causes without addressing the internal renewal necessary to exercise justice properly.

Similarly, Romans 12:1-2 teaches that transformation must begin in believers' hearts and minds: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God, your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world; but be reformed in the newness of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God". These verses highlight the importance of individual spiritual renewal, which is foundational for living out the justice that Scripture demands. Transformation in the life of a believer is not just about changing external systems but about the internal change that aligns with God's will, which is integral to pursuing justice in all areas of life. Selective preaching that only highlights justice in a social or political sense while disregarding the individual responsibility of repentance, personal transformation, and holiness can

inadvertently promote a form of justice disconnected from the gospel's call to spiritual renewal.

Furthermore, selective preaching on justice can obscure the biblical teaching that justice is often intertwined with judgment and reconciliation, particularly concerning the eternal consequences of sin. While Scripture calls believers to work towards justice in the social realm, it also highlights the importance of reconciliation with God and the judgment of sin as part of God's justice. For example, Revelation 21:8 speaks about the ultimate judgment of the unjust: "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, they shall have their portion in the pool burning with fire and brimstone, which is the second death". This sobering verse, which speaks of God's final judgment on sin and the eternal consequences of moral injustice, is often minimised or ignored in social justice discussions, particularly within contemporary Christian movements that focus solely on human-made social injustices.

By selectively ignoring passages that address eternal judgment and the spiritual ramifications of sin, preachers may inadvertently create a one-dimensional understanding of justice that focuses only on social and economic issues. This selective emphasis risks obscuring the full biblical view of justice, which includes God's righteous judgment on human sin and His plan for eternal reconciliation through the cross of Christ. The Bible teaches that true justice is comprehensive, addressing not only the present societal injustices but also the ultimate justice that God will enact in the eschaton. This is why Romans 2:6 says that God "…who will render to every man according to his works". The church's social justice efforts must be rooted in the

understanding that temporal justice (in terms of human rights, alleviating poverty, and promoting equality) must not be separated from the eternal justice that includes both judgment and salvation.

Therefore, selective preaching that emphasises social justice without integrating these dimensions of repentance, reconciliation, and judgment can present a partial view of biblical justice. The Bible calls for both individual and collective justice, but it does so within a framework that includes personal repentance, holiness, and the reality of God's judgment and salvation. Social justice cannot be rightly understood or fully enacted apart from these spiritual truths. Preachers must be careful not to reduce biblical justice to a set of social programs or political ideologies but to ensure that it is anchored in the gospel of Jesus Christ, which offers reconciliation between God and humanity and provides the foundation for all justice in this world and the next.

Ultimately, a holistic approach to justice—including personal transformation, societal reform, and the eternal justice of God—ensures that preaching on social and ethical issues remains faithful to the fullness of Scripture. This approach challenges congregations to engage with the world's injustices while also calling them to personal holiness, spiritual transformation, and a deeper relationship with God. Preaching that balances these elements fosters social action and encourages the church to embody God's justice in all aspects of life, grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

4.1.2 Selective Use of Scriptures on Wealth and Poverty

Wealth and poverty are central themes in many Christian sermons, especially those focused on financial prosperity. In the prosperity gospel movement, certain verses are

often selectively emphasised to advocate for the belief that faith and financial giving directly result in material wealth and divine favour. Preachers may highlight passages like Malachi 3:10 ("Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and try me in this, saith the Lord: if I open not unto you the flood-gates of heaven, and pour you out a blessing even to abundance") and Luke 6:38 ("Give, and it shall be given to you...") to encourage congregants to give generously, often with the promise of receiving material blessings in return. These verses are used to frame the practice of tithing and financial giving as a direct investment in divine blessing and wealth.

Such interpretations are prevalent in prosperity teachings, where material success is seen as a sign of spiritual favour and financial generosity is often presented as a means to unlock divine blessings. The emphasis here is on the tangible rewards that are perceived to result from giving, which aligns with the broader teachings of the prosperity gospel that encourage believers to pursue wealth as a goal of their faith. By using verses that affirm the promise of blessings and divine favour, this approach cultivates an expectation of material gain as the reward for giving. However, while these verses may be interpreted in such a way, selective preaching of these texts risks neglecting other, equally important, teachings of Scripture that provide a more holistic understanding of wealth, poverty, and biblical stewardship.

4.1.2.a Neglect of the Dangers of Wealth

One significant issue with selective preaching on wealth is that it often overlooks or downplays the Bible's warnings about the dangers of wealth. Scripture contains numerous passages that caution believers about the spiritual risks associated with the

pursuit of riches, such as 1 Timothy 6:9-10: "For they that will become rich, fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition. For the desire of money is the root of all evils; which some coveting have erred from the faith, and have entangled themselves in many sorrows". These verses caution against the desire for wealth as an ultimate goal, highlighting the temptation to indulge in materialistic pursuits, which can ultimately lead to destruction. By not addressing these warnings, selective preaching can foster a theology that encourages the pursuit of wealth without considering the ethical and spiritual dangers that come with it.

Matthew 6:24 further reinforces this idea: "No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one, and love the other: or he will sustain the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon". This verse underscores the incompatibility of serving God and the pursuit of wealth. By selectively ignoring such scriptures, preachers inadvertently present a distorted view of biblical faithfulness, which suggests that financial success should be prioritised over spiritual devotion. The broader biblical narrative stresses that while wealth itself is not inherently evil, the love of money can draw individuals away from God, creating a false idol. Therefore, sermons focusing solely on the promises of prosperity without addressing the ethical implications of wealth can encourage a materialistic mindset that undermines biblical principles of contentment, stewardship, and spiritual focus.

In the context of the broader biblical narrative, wealth is presented not as an end in itself, but as a tool to further God's kingdom and support the work of justice and mercy in the world. When preachers focus exclusively on the blessings of financial prosperity,

they risk obscuring the ethical responsibility accompanying wealth, such as the need for generosity, justice, and humility. The Bible warns against wealth's potential to become a stumbling block to faith, urging Christians to maintain a proper perspective on material resources and their role in the kingdom of God.

4.1.2.b Overlooking Biblical Teachings on Generosity and Poverty

Selective preaching also often underemphasises the Bible's call to care for the poor and practice generosity, which is a key theme throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Verses like Proverbs 19:17 ("He that hath mercy on the poor, lendeth to the Lord: and he will repay him") and Matthew 25:40 ("And the king answering, shall say to them: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me") are central to the biblical message of caring for the marginalised and those in poverty. These passages emphasise that serving the poor and the vulnerable is not optional in the life of a believer, but a direct reflection of one's relationship with God.

Nevertheless, sermons that focus on wealth creation and financial blessings often fail to highlight the importance of generosity towards the poor. By neglecting these teachings, preachers may create a theology that encourages accumulation and consumption rather than sharing and serving others in need. Biblical stewardship is not just about accumulating wealth for oneself, but about using the wealth entrusted to us for the common good and the work of God's kingdom.

Furthermore, Jesus' ministry was one that consistently aligned itself with the poor and marginalised, as seen in passages like Luke 4:18, where He declares, "The Spirit of

the Lord is upon me. Wherefore he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the contrite of heart". Jesus' teachings emphasise that the faithful response to poverty involves both justice and compassion, not just financial transactions, but a radical reorientation of priorities. Matthew 6:3-4 reminds believers: "But when thou dost alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth. That thy alms may be in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee". This passage teaches that giving should be done humbly, without seeking earthly reward, and underscores the ethical imperative to support those in need rather than accumulating wealth for personal gain.

A sermon on wealth and poverty that does not address generosity and the ethical responsibility of wealth risks presenting an incomplete and skewed view of Scripture. The Bible consistently calls Christians to consider their wealth in light of the needs of others, particularly those in poverty, and to practice generosity as an expression of faith. A more balanced approach would teach congregants to resist the temptation of greed and materialism while embracing God's command to care for less fortunate people.

4.1.2.c A Holistic Biblical Understanding of Wealth

In light of the above, a balanced sermon on wealth and poverty should address both the promise of God's provision and the ethical implications of wealth in the believer's life. Preachers should emphasise the importance of wealth as a tool for advancing God's kingdom, including through acts of generosity, justice, and mercy. This includes teaching on financial stewardship, not as a means to personal prosperity but as a

responsibility before God to manage resources wisely for His glory and the benefit of others.

The Bible clearly states that the love of money is dangerous, and that wealth is not an end in itself but a resource entrusted by God for good works. Preachers should highlight God's care for the poor, the spiritual dangers of wealth, and the need for generosity and compassion. By presenting a balanced understanding of wealth and poverty, preachers can guide their congregations toward a biblical view of financial stewardship that prioritises eternal values over temporary material gain.

The call to generosity is not simply a call to give away money, but a call to align one's heart with God's values: compassion for the poor, justice for the oppressed, and stewardship of wealth for God's glory. By broadening the conversation on wealth to include these dimensions, preachers can encourage their congregations to engage with Scripture to promote a well-rounded Christian life, one that resists the allure of materialism and seeks to build a kingdom-oriented approach to wealth and poverty.

4.1.3 Racial Equality and Inclusivity in the Church

Racial equality and inclusivity in the church are increasingly emphasised in contemporary preaching, reflecting the growing awareness of systemic injustices and the need for unity within the body of Christ. Preachers often draw on verses such as Galatians 3:28 ("There is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus") and Revelation 7:9 ("After this I saw a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne, and in sight of the Lamb,

clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands") to highlight the biblical call for unity and inclusivity in the church. These verses are central to the message of Christian inclusivity, underscoring that, in Christ, all believers—regardless of race, ethnicity, or social status—are equally part of God's family.

Galatians 3:28 emphasises the gospel's radical inclusivity, declaring that all distinctions between people are obliterated in Christ. This verse is often cited in contemporary sermons to encourage congregations to embrace diversity, affirming that the gospel transcends human-made categories and divisions. Similarly, Revelation 7:9 envisions a future reality where believers from all nations, ethnicities, and languages are gathered together in worship before the throne of God, serving as a powerful symbol of God's ultimate plan for unity across racial and cultural lines. These passages are crucial in proclaiming the equality of all people before God and challenging the church to reflect this equality in both its teachings and practices.

However, selective preaching on racial equality can sometimes overemphasise these texts in isolation, neglecting other aspects of Scripture that challenge contemporary understandings of inclusivity and address the deeper issues of reconciliation and sin that are central to building a genuinely inclusive community. While the Bible clearly calls for unity in Christ, it also emphasises the work of reconciliation required for true peace and unity to be realised within the church. Without addressing the need for reconciliation, the call for inclusivity can become superficial, failing to address the systemic issues that divide the church and society, including racial prejudice and historical injustices.

4.1.3.a The Biblical Call for Reconciliation and Addressing Systemic Sin

The Bible not only calls for unity and equality but also emphasises the importance of reconciliation as a necessary step toward healing divisions, especially those rooted in racial and ethnic tensions. The New Testament speaks directly to this need for reconciliation, particularly in letters like 2 Corinthians 5:18-19. Paul writes, "But all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Christ; and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation. For God indeed was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing to them their sins; and he hath placed in us the word of reconciliation", highlighting that reconciliation is not merely a social or political concept but a theological mandate for the church. The ministry of reconciliation, entrusted to believers, requires an active commitment to address the wounds caused by sin, including the systemic sin of racism.

Selective preaching on racial equality can often overlook this aspect of reconciliation, reducing it to a call for superficial unity without acknowledging the deep divisions that need to be addressed. True reconciliation involves confession, repentance, and restoration, both on an individual level and within the broader church community. The church cannot claim to be inclusive while leaving unaddressed the persistent systemic sins of racism and prejudice that have historically divided congregations along racial and ethnic lines.

The Scriptures clarify that reconciliation goes beyond surface-level unity; it is a transformative process involving repentance and a commitment to right relationships. For example, Matthew 5:23-24 teaches that if a believer knows of conflict with a brother or sister, they must go and be reconciled before offering their gift at the altar.

This teaching applies to racial and ethnic reconciliation as well—churches must actively seek to heal and restore relationships that historical injustices and prejudices have fractured. Reconciliation is not simply about tolerating diversity but about restoring broken relationships and actively addressing the legacy of racial injustice that has shaped the church's history. Without addressing these issues, churches may overlook the depth of the reconciliation process, leaving behind unresolved tensions that hinder true unity.

4.1.3.b Avoidance of Personal Responsibility, Sin, and Repentance

Another significant limitation of selective preaching on racial equality is that it often avoids difficult conversations about personal responsibility and sin, particularly as they relate to issues of racial prejudice. While the call for inclusivity and unity in Christ is essential, it is equally important for the church to confront the reality of personal sin—especially the sin of racial prejudice and discrimination—that perpetuates division within the body of Christ. The Bible teaches that unity does not come through ignoring the reality of sin but through repentance and transformation.

For example, Ephesians 4:22-24 speaks to the believer's need for transformation: "To put off, according to former conversation, the old man, who is corrupted according to the desire of error. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind. And put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth". The passage addresses the need for personal renewal, not just in how we relate to God, but also in how we relate to others. If a church community is to be truly inclusive, it must confront the sin of racial prejudice, which often operates at both individual and systemic levels, and seek repentance and transformation under God's Word.

Selective preaching that ignores these aspects risks promoting a form of unity that is superficial and empty, as it fails to address the hard work of confronting and overcoming the sin that divides. While the church may proclaim unity in Christ, it will remain ineffective if it fails to engage in the difficult task of repentance, recognising how personal biases and historical injustices have shaped divisions within the body of Christ. Repentance is an essential part of the gospel message and must be incorporated into sermons addressing racial reconciliation. Preaching that calls for repentance and personal responsibility before God is crucial for creating a genuinely inclusive community.

4.1.3.c Superficial Inclusivity Versus Gospel Reconciliation

A truly inclusive church must go beyond surface-level unity and engage in the hard work of reconciliation, both individually and corporately. This reconciliation must be rooted in biblical repentance and the acknowledgment of systemic issues, such as racial prejudice, that have historically plagued the church. Simply preaching unity without addressing sin or promoting transformation can create a church environment where racial and ethnic divisions remain hidden, causing the inclusivity preached to be merely cosmetic rather than a true reflection of the gospel.

Biblical reconciliation is costly. It requires humbling pride, acknowledging past wrongs, and committing to real change. The church must not only advocate for racial equality through words but also live out that call by addressing the personal and corporate sins that perpetuate division. This includes calling for personal repentance from attitudes of prejudice and embracing the responsibility of confronting systemic injustice.

The gospel teaches that true unity in Christ is built on the foundation of reconciliation—not only to one another but also to God. It requires a community to look at the deep-rooted problems of sin and brokenness that divide and to commit to the long process of healing and transformation through the power of the gospel. Preachers must not only call for unity but also teach the church how to reconcile in the way that Christ has reconciled us to God through His sacrifice, addressing the root issues of sin and division with honesty and humility.

The church must go beyond merely preaching unity and inclusivity in Christ. It should also address deeper issues like racial reconciliation, personal repentance, and systemic racial prejudice. By tackling these foundational aspects, the church can genuinely reflect the inclusivity of the gospel and embody God's reconciliation. Effective preaching should lead to both unity and transformation, recognising human sin while celebrating the gospel's power to heal and restore relationships across racial and ethnic boundaries.

4.2 Case Study 2: Selective Verses in Prosperity Theology

Prosperity theology, also known as the Word of Faith movement (https://www.wordoffaith.cc/), has emerged as a prominent theological framework within various Christian denominations, particularly in the United States, Africa, and parts of Latin America. This theological perspective emphasises that faith, positive confession, and financial giving can lead to material wealth, health, and success. Central to prosperity theology is the belief that God desires believers to live in prosperity, and through faith, they can claim God's promises of wealth and divine favour.

Preachers within the prosperity movement frequently cite specific biblical verses to support these claims. They often use selective scripture highlighting material blessings while downplaying or ignoring passages addressing suffering, contentment, and the dangers of wealth. This case study focuses on how the selective use of Scripture in prosperity theology can distort the broader biblical teachings on wealth, prosperity, and spiritual maturity.

Prosperity theology often involves carefully selecting certain verses while neglecting others that provide a more holistic or balanced view of the Bible. By analysing the use of Scripture in prosperity theology, this case study aims to illuminate the theological dangers and potential harm of misinterpreting the Bible for personal or material gain.

4.2.1 Commonly Cited Scriptures in Prosperity Theology

Preachers within the prosperity movement commonly emphasise verses that promise financial prosperity, physical healing, and success in life. Some of the most frequently quoted scriptures include Malachi 3:10: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and try me in this, saith the Lord: if I open not unto you the flood-gates of heaven, and pour you out a blessing even to abundance". Prosperity preachers often use this verse to encourage believers to give generously, claiming that God will bless them abundantly in return. This is interpreted as a guarantee of financial prosperity for those who give faithfully to the church. Luke 6:38: "Give, and it shall be given to you: good measure and pressed down and shaken together and running over shall they give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you shall mete withal, it shall be measured to you again". This verse is often cited to emphasise that financial giving is a way to receive blessings from God, particularly

material blessings. It suggests that those who give generously to God will receive much more in return. 3 John 1:2: "The ancient to the dearly beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. Dearly beloved, concerning all things I make it my prayer that thou mayest proceed prosperously, and fare well as thy soul doth prosperously". Prosperity preachers use this verse to promote the idea that God desires His followers to experience physical health, financial success, and emotional well-being as part of His blessings in their lives.

These verses are interpreted to suggest that giving to God—whether through tithing, "sowing seeds of faith", or making offerings—will result in tangible material blessings. While these scriptures affirm the importance of generosity and underscore that God is a giver of good gifts, prosperity theology often isolates these verses from their broader biblical context, resulting in misleading interpretations about God's intentions for wealth and success.

4.2.2 Selective Preaching and Misapplication of Scripture

Prosperity theology often emphasises verses that suggest material blessings and success, while overlooking or downplaying other important biblical teachings that provide a more comprehensive understanding of wealth and prosperity. One of the main dangers of this selective approach is that it leads to a theology in which financial prosperity is equated with spiritual maturity and God's favour. Conversely, suffering, poverty, or hardship may be viewed as signs of insufficient faith. This perspective can cause believers to feel condemned or spiritually inadequate if they do not experience the expected material blessings.

Some overlooked or underemphasised scriptures in prosperity theology include Matthew 6:19-21 "Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth: where the rust, and moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal. However, lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven: where neither the rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through, nor steal. For where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also". This passage highlights the dangers of prioritising material wealth and suggests that true treasure is found in heavenly, eternal things rather than earthly possessions. In contrast, prosperity theology often emphasises accumulating wealth in the present, fostering a materialistic mindset that focuses on temporary gains rather than eternal rewards. In 1 Timothy 6:9-10, "For they that will become rich, fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition. For the desire of money is the root of all evils; which some coveting have erred from the faith, and have entangled themselves in many sorrows". Prosperity preachers often ignore these warnings, as they contradict the focus on accumulating wealth. This passage underscores the spiritual danger of an unhealthy obsession with money, highlighting that the desire for riches can lead to temptation and spiritual ruin.

In its selective use of Scripture, prosperity theology may inadvertently promote a distorted view of wealth, encouraging a materialistic approach instead of focusing on contentment and godliness Philippians 4:11-13: "I speak not as it were for want. For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, to be content therewith. I know both how to be brought low, and I know how to abound (everywhere, and in all things I am instructed), both to be full and hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all these things in him who strengtheneth me". This passage emphasises the importance

of contentment, regardless of one's financial situation. It demonstrates the biblical view that spiritual maturity is not measured by wealth or prosperity, but by the ability to be content in all circumstances. Prosperity theology, however, tends to focus on the idea that God's will is for believers to prosper materially, thereby sidelining the importance of contentment and spiritual sufficiency in Christ. By isolating verses that promote financial gain while ignoring those that address contentment, the dangers of wealth, and spiritual maturity in adversity, prosperity theology creates a theological imbalance that distorts the true nature of Christian discipleship.

4.2.3 The Harmful Impact of Prosperity Theology on Believers

Selective preaching on prosperity can lead to several negative consequences for believers. First, it fosters a materialistic mindset that can dominate their lives. When financial prosperity is equated with spiritual favour, Christians may measure their faith by their wealth. This can lead them to assume that poverty or financial struggle results from insufficient faith, creating a toxic spiritual culture in which financial success becomes the ultimate indicator of spiritual vitality.

Second, the prosperity gospel can cause disillusionment and guilt for believers who do not experience the promised material blessings. Those who follow prosperity teachings might feel that their lack of financial success reflects a failure in their faith, leading to feelings of inadequacy and self-condemnation. The emotional toll of such beliefs can be profound, especially for those facing financial hardship due to factors beyond their control, such as unemployment, illness, or systemic inequality.

Third, prosperity theology can distort the biblical view of suffering. When the promise of wealth and health dominates the teaching, it risks presenting a false gospel that views suffering as avoidable or a consequence of poor faith. This teaching can prevent believers from recognising suffering as part of the Christian journey—one that refines faith and fosters greater dependence on God. Scriptures like Romans 8:17 and James 1:2-4 remind believers that suffering can be a tool for spiritual growth and that Christians are called to endure trials with the hope of future glory.

Finally, prosperity theology may exploit the generosity of believers for the benefit of church leaders or organisations. Preachers often ask congregants to "sow financial seeds" with the promise of miraculous returns, leading to a theology that takes advantage of the faithful for financial gain. This manipulation of Scripture and the faith of believers raises serious ethical concerns, as it preys on vulnerable individuals seeking divine intervention in their financial situations.

4.2.4 A Balanced Approach to Biblical Prosperity

A balanced approach to biblical prosperity acknowledges the legitimate promises of God's provision for His people while emphasising stewardship, contentment, and the eternal perspective of wealth. Biblical prosperity is not about accumulating material wealth but recognising that God is the provider of all things. His blessings extend beyond material riches to include spiritual maturity, a relationship with Him, and the ability to live generously. True prosperity is about being rich toward God (Luke 12:21) and cultivating a heart that honours Him with resources, regardless of their abundance or scarcity.

A balanced theology would also address the spiritual dangers of wealth, as Scripture does in numerous passages. It would encourage believers to seek God's kingdom first, trusting that He will provide for their needs (Matthew 6:33). This kind of preaching challenges believers to evaluate their desires for wealth and ensures that their financial aspirations align with God's will, rather than allowing materialism to cloud their spiritual vision.

The selective use of Scripture in prosperity theology distorts biblical teachings on wealth, prosperity, and the gospel. By emphasising certain verses that promise material blessings while neglecting others that warn against the dangers of wealth and the call to contentment, prosperity theology leads to a skewed and harmful view of the Christian faith. This case study highlights the need for preachers to present a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of wealth and prosperity that integrates stewardship, spiritual contentment, and eternal hope. True prosperity in the Christian faith is not measured by material wealth but by spiritual growth, generosity, and the pursuit of God's kingdom.

Selective preaching in prosperity theology misinterprets Scripture by focusing on material blessings and ignoring broader teachings on wealth, suffering, and spiritual maturity. This can lead to a materialistic mindset equating financial prosperity with spiritual success. A more faithful biblical approach emphasises contentment, the dangers of wealth, and eternal rewards, recognising that spiritual growth, contentment, and obedience to God's will are the actual markers of faithfulness.

4.3 Case Study 3: Exclusive Salvation and Sectarian Claims: Analysis of Preaching Practices of the Iglesia Ni Cristo and Other Religious Sects

Exclusive claims to salvation and sectarian beliefs represent some of the most controversial and potentially dangerous theological positions that can arise within certain religious movements or denominations. This case study explores how groups like the INC and similar sects use selective interpretations of the Bible to assert that their specific sect is the exclusive means of achieving salvation. These claims often rest on the idea that only members of their group possess the truth, positioning themselves as the true representatives of God's Kingdom on earth. How such sectarian claims can originate from selective scriptural interpretation, how they distort the genuine Christian understanding of salvation, and the theological dangers associated with these exclusivist doctrines will be examined.

4.3.1 Theological Basis for Exclusive Salvation Claims

4.3.1.a Acts 4:12 and the Exclusivity of Salvation

One of the most frequently cited verses to support exclusive claims about salvation is Acts 4:12, which states, "Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved". This verse is foundational to Christian doctrine because it emphasises that salvation is exclusively found in Jesus Christ. The New Testament clearly states that faith in Christ is the means of salvation for all people (see John 14:6 and Acts 10:43). However, some sectarian groups misinterpret or selectively apply this verse to argue that only their particular denomination or movement holds the exclusive truth and that all other Christian groups, or even non-Christians, are excluded from the possibility of salvation.

By isolating Acts 4:12 from its broader context, these groups misapply the passage to support a sectarian view of Christianity.

In the context of the book of Acts, Peter's proclamation was made before the Jewish leaders who questioned the apostles' authority and the validity of their message. His statement is an explicit declaration that Christ alone is the source of salvation, in contrast to the religious systems of the time. This passage emphasises that salvation comes through faith in Christ, not through any other religious leader or system. However, sectarian interpretations often distort this message. They equate "salvation in no one else" with the idea that membership in their movement or denomination is the exclusive means of accessing that salvation. They argue that only those who adhere to their specific teachings and practices possess true faith and, therefore, the only valid means of salvation (Manalo, 1998). This interpretation misrepresents the core of the Christian gospel, which teaches that salvation is available to all who call on the name of Jesus Christ, regardless of denominational labels. The broader Christian tradition has consistently held that the essential requirement for salvation is faith in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9) or faith justified by works (James 2:24) in Roman Catholicism, not the institutional affiliation of the believer.

4.3.1.b John 14:6 and the Misapplication of Jesus' Exclusivity

A passage sectarian groups often cite is John 14:6, where Jesus declares: "Jesus saith to him: I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by me" This verse is central to Christian teachings on the exclusivity of Christ. It emphasises that Christ alone is the way to God and salvation, affirming the belief that salvation cannot be found apart from Jesus. However, similar to Acts 4:12, sectarian

groups frequently take this passage out of context. They argue that the phrase "no one comes to the Father except through me" applies not only to faith in Christ, but also to membership in their specific group or movement. These groups create a dangerous theological framework by interpreting the verse in this manner. They suggest that the correct interpretation of Christ's teachings can only be found within their specific organisation, implying or in INC's case, explicitly declaring those in other Christian traditions, mainly the Roman Catholic Church (Manalo, 1998)—who also profess faith in Christ—are either misguided or excluded from salvation.

This interpretation not only divides the Christian community but also overlooks the unity that Scripture emphasises within the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 and Ephesians 4:4-6). The Bible teaches that salvation comes through Christ alone, but it does not assert that salvation is exclusively available through membership in any denomination. While Christ's statement in John 14:6 highlights the importance of a personal relationship with Him, it does not limit salvation to those who belong to a specific movement or organisation. The exclusive application of this verse to specific sects is a theological distortion that creates unnecessary barriers to unity within the body of Christ and undermines the universal scope of the gospel.

4.3.1.c The Distortion of Christ's Universal Call to Salvation

The selective interpretation of verses such as Acts 4:12 and John 14:6 contributes to a theological distortion of Christ's universal call to salvation. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus' mission was not to establish a sectarian movement but to offer salvation to all people—both Jew and Gentile. His inclusive ministry aimed to break down race, class, and religious tradition barriers. For example, in Matthew 28:19-20,

Jesus commands His disciples to make disciples of all nations, not just a select group, and promises to be with them until the end of the age. The claims of exclusive salvation made by sectarian groups contradict this universal mission. By asserting that their group is the only true church and that salvation can only be found through their organisation, they overlook the inclusive nature of Christ's work, which was intended for people of all nations and backgrounds. Such sectarian claims restrict the gospel's scope, reducing it to a privileged understanding that is accessible only to those within a particular denomination, while excluding other Christian groups or individuals from the opportunity to receive Christ's salvation.

The Bible affirms that salvation is available to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour (Romans 10:9). This belief is rooted in the New Testament's testimony that anyone who believes in Jesus will not perish but will have eternal life (John 3:16). The idea of exclusive salvation contradicts this message, which emphasises the openness of God's grace and the accessibility of salvation through faith in Christ, regardless of denominational affiliation.

4.3.2 The Impact of Exclusive Salvation on Unity in the Body of Christ

Exclusive claims to salvation are not only theologically problematic but also harmful to the unity of the Christian church. These claims assert that salvation can only be attained within a specific religious group or denomination, leading to significant divisions among believers. By insisting that only their sect possesses the truth or the keys to salvation, these groups alienate other Christians, creating a damaging "us versus them” mentality. This divisiveness undermines the Bible's core teaching, which

calls for unity among believers, and ultimately weakens the church's witness to the world.

4.3.2.a Theological Impact: Dividing the Body of Christ

From a theological perspective, sectarianism distorts the gospel's message. It diminishes the biblical truth that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ alone or faith plus works rather than adherence to any specific denomination or movement. The Bible teaches that all believers, regardless of denominational background, are part of the same body of Christ, united by their common faith in Him.

Passages like 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 emphasise that although believers may come from diverse backgrounds, they are all members of one body, working together as part of God's plan for the world: "For as the body is one, and hath many members; and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body, so also is Christ. For in one Spirit where we all baptised into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free; and in one Spirit we have all been made to drink. For the body also is not one member, but many". Similarly, Ephesians 4:3-6 urges believers to preserve the unity of the Spirit: "As you reading, may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and co-partners of his promise in Christ Jesus, by the gospel" These verses make it clear that the unity of believers is not dependent on denominational affiliation but is rooted in shared faith in Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of all Christians. Sectarianism, which suggests that only certain groups are truly saved, directly contradicts the teaching of unity within the body

of Christ. By prioritising group membership as a crucial criterion for salvation, sectarian movements create unnecessary barriers between brothers and sisters in Christ. These barriers not only undermine the truth of the gospel but also go against the message of reconciliation and unity that Jesus Himself prayed for in John 17:20-23, where He prayed that all believers would be one, just as He and the Father are one.

4.3.2.b Relational Harm: Alienation and Division

Sectarianism has a profound relational impact. By fostering an "us versus them" mentality, sectarian movements create an environment filled with suspicion, judgment, and alienation among believers. Members of sectarian groups are often taught to view Christians outside their movement as spiritually inferior or even as false Christians. This mindset strains relationships between believers and disrupts the global body of Christ. Rather than encouraging love, respect, and mutual support among all Christians, sectarianism promotes division and hostility within the broader Christian community.

The relational damage goes beyond mere doctrinal differences and affects personal relationships and the emotional well-being of those caught in the middle. Sectarianism can lead to spiritual isolation for believers who feel unwelcome or rejected by family, friends, and fellow Christians who do not belong to their specific movement. In extreme cases, sectarian groups like the INC, demand total conformity, pressuring individuals to cut ties with their wider Christian communities. This form of spiritual abuse isolates people from the love and support of the broader church. It can create profound emotional and psychological scars, resulting in feelings of guilt, shame, or worthlessness.

Believers who feel they are not truly saved because they belong to a different denomination may experience doubts about their salvation, leading them to withdraw from their faith altogether. The emotional toll can be devastating, especially when individuals feel they must choose between their family and friends or their faith community. Sectarianism's relational impact undermines the church's witness to the world, creating disunity, division, and emotional harm within the very community that is meant to embody Christ's love and grace.

4.3.2.c The Missional Impact: Limiting the Scope of God's Salvation

A significant issue with sectarian exclusivity is its impact on the church's mission. The Bible clearly teaches that God desires all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4) and that the church's mission is to proclaim the gospel to every nation (Matthew 28:19-20). However, the doctrine of exclusive salvation, promoted by sectarian groups such as the INC, directly contradicts this biblical mandate. By limiting salvation to a select group of believers, sectarianism narrows the scope of God's redemptive work and restricts the church's mission.

Matthew 28:19-20 is known as the Great Commission, where Jesus commands His disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. This passage emphasises the church's universal mission—one that transcends denominational boundaries and calls all Christians to participate in the global proclamation of the gospel. Jesus' call to make disciples is not about promoting a particular movement or sect, but about sharing the message of salvation through Christ with all people, in all cultures, and across all nations. This mission is driven by the understanding that God's love is for the entire world and that salvation is available to everyone who believes in Christ (John 3:16).

Sectarianism undermines this mission by encouraging believers to focus inward on preserving their own group rather than outward on expanding God's kingdom. The claim that salvation is available only through a specific sect limits the scope of evangelism, preventing the church from fully engaging in its call to make disciples of all nations. In contrast, the Bible emphasises that the gospel is good news for everyone, and the church is called to reach beyond itself to share the message of salvation with the world.

Furthermore, the doctrine of exclusive salvation creates a barrier to evangelism by suggesting that only certain people can receive the gospel. This undermines the inclusive nature of God's grace and limits the gospel's transformative power in the world. Instead of uniting Christians in a global mission to share Christ with everyone, sectarianism isolates groups. It fosters a sense of spiritual elitism that directly contradicts God's desire for universal salvation.

4.3.2.d Theological and Ethical Consequences of Sectarianism

The theological consequences of sectarian exclusivity are significant. By asserting that salvation is only available through a specific denomination or movement, sectarianism distorts the core message of the gospel. Salvation by grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9) is not contingent upon affiliation with any group; rather, it depends on faith in Jesus Christ. By denying universal access to salvation, sectarian groups elevate human tradition above the grace of God and diminish the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The Bible teaches that salvation is not earned by membership in any human institution but is a free gift from God (Romans 6:23), available to all who put their faith in Christ (Romans 10:9).

Ethically, sectarianism leads to spiritual manipulation and abuse, as groups that claim exclusive access to salvation often exert undue control over their members. This can result in coercive tactics, where individuals are pressured to conform to the group's teachings and practices under the threat of being deemed unsaved. The ethical harm caused by such practices is far-reaching, as it exploits the vulnerability of believers who are genuinely searching for truth and salvation. The church's moral responsibility is to love and serve others, not to create division or claim a monopoly on salvation.

4.3.3 Theological Consequences of Sectarian Claims

The theological implications of sectarian claims to exclusive salvation are significant and far-reaching. When a religious group or denomination claims it is the only path to salvation, it distorts the true nature of the gospel. It undermines the universality of God's redemptive plan. Sectarianism diminishes the all-encompassing nature of salvation that Scripture teaches, which is available to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ (John 3:16, Romans 10:9). By elevating their specific group or denomination as the sole means of attaining salvation, these movements create a theology centred on human institutions and traditions, rather than on Christ alone as the Saviour of the world.

4.3.3.a Diminishing the Universality of the Gospel

One of the most significant theological consequences of sectarian claims is the diminishment of the universality of the gospel. The Bible consistently emphasises that salvation is offered to all people, regardless of their background, nationality, or religious affiliation. In John 14:6, Jesus declares, "Jesus saith to him: I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by me", affirming that

salvation is found only through Christ. This assertion does not imply that salvation depends on belonging to a specific sect or denomination; it is based on faith in Christ. The gospel is intended to be inclusive, extending its message to everyone in every corner of the world, as shown in Matthew 28:19-20 and Revelation 7:9. However, sectarian claims make salvation contingent upon membership in a particular group or religious institution, which directly contradicts the inclusive message of the gospel. The early church actively worked to spread the message of salvation beyond ethnic and religious boundaries, emphasising that salvation was available to Gentiles as well as Jews (see Acts 10:34-35 and Romans 10:12). Sectarianism distorts this message by introducing divisions and exclusivity within the body of Christ, thereby limiting the gospel's reach and potential impact. This narrowing of salvation contradicts the Bible's teaching that Christ's redemptive work is for all people, regardless of their denomination.

4.3.3.b Harmonious Relationship of Faith and Works and Exclusivity Destruction

The Bible teaches that salvation is by grace through faith, not through adherence to human institutions or traditions. Ephesians 2:8-9 emphasises that salvation is a gift from God, not something earned by religious affiliation. The notion of institution-based salvation, promoted by some groups like the INC, distorts the gospel by making salvation dependent on human effort, which diminishes the sufficiency of Christ's work on the cross. This approach diverts attention from Christ's atoning sacrifice and can lead to theological confusion and anxiety about eternal security. Genuine assurance of salvation comes from faith in Christ's work alone, as highlighted in Romans 3:28, Galatians 2:16, and 1 John 5:13.

The Bible also teaches that genuine faith in Christ naturally results in good works. While salvation is by grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9), true faith is demonstrated by a transformed life that produces good works. James 2:17 states that faith without works is dead, emphasising that faith without action is incomplete. Good works are not the basis of salvation but rather the evidence of it. Jesus illustrated this in Matthew 7:16-20, explaining that a tree is recognised by its fruit. Paul further notes in Galatians 5:6 that faith expresses itself through love, indicating that true faith leads to loving actions and obedience to God's commands. James 2:18-26 uses Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac as an example of faith demonstrated through action.

Good works are a response to the grace we have received. Ephesians 2:10 states that we are created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us. While works cannot earn salvation, they are an important part of the Christian life. As Titus 3:8 encourages, believers should devote themselves to doing good. In summary, faith and works are complementary aspects of the Christian life, with genuine faith leading to good works that serve as evidence of our salvation and a response to God's grace. These attributes will bring a person to salvation and not religious affiliation.

4.3.3.c The Danger of Relying on Human Efforts for Eternal Security

The belief that salvation is only attainable through a specific sect or movement shifts the focus from Christ's finished work on the cross to human effort and affiliation. In sectarian systems, salvation often depends on an individual's membership in the group and adherence to its teachings and practices. This approach is not only

unbiblical but also creates spiritual insecurity for believers, who may constantly question whether they are doing enough to earn or maintain their salvation.

The Bible consistently affirms that eternal security is based solely on faith in Christ, not human works or religious affiliation. In Romans 3:28, Paul writes, "For we account a man to be justified by faith, without the works of the law". The doctrine of justification by faith is central to the Christian message; it teaches that believers are declared righteous before God solely based on their faith in Jesus Christ, not by any merit of their own (Galatians 2:16, Philippians 3:9).

The danger of an institution-based approach to salvation is that it can lead to spiritual anxiety, making believers wonder if they have joined the right church to earn God's approval. This mindset fosters a membership-based relationship with God rather than one rooted in trust and grace. In contrast, the gospel message offers freedom from this burden by assuring believers that they are saved by grace alone (Ephesians 2:8-9) and that their security rests not in their own efforts but in Christ's completed work on the cross. The Bible provides great comfort to believers, declaring that nothing can separate them from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39) and that their salvation is secure in Christ (John 10:28-30).

4.3.3.d Undermining the Sufficiency of Christ's Work

The claim that salvation is available only through a particular sect or movement undermines the sufficiency of Christ's atoning work. The Bible teaches that Christ's death on the cross was sufficient to pay the penalty for sin and bring believers into a

right relationship with God (2 Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 10:10). Christ's work is complete, and nothing more is required to secure salvation.

The idea that salvation can only be obtained through affiliation with a specific church or religious group adds to the work of Christ, implying that His sacrifice is insufficient or incomplete. By elevating the role of group membership, sectarian movements effectively teach that Christ's atonement is not enough. They suggest that believers must rely on their religious affiliation, group identity, or adherence to religious rituals to be saved. This not only distorts the gospel but also robs believers of the freedom and assurance that comes from knowing their salvation is secure in Christ alone.

Colossians 2:13-14 states that believers are "And you, when you were dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh; he hath quickened together with him, forgiving you all offences. Blotting out the handwriting of the decree that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he hath taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the cross". This declaration affirms that Christ's work is sufficient for salvation, and no additional requirements, including affiliation with any human institution, are necessary for redemption.

4.4 Cross-Case Analysis - Case Study: Iglesia Ni Cristo

INC is a religious organisation founded in the early 20th century by Felix Y Manalo in the Philippines (Manalo, 1998) (https://iglesianicristo.net/). It is a prominent example of a group that claims exclusive salvation. INC asserts that it is the one true church established by Christ and that salvation is only possible for members of this specific group (Manalo, 1998). According to its teachings, all other Christian denominations

are considered false churches, and their adherents are labelled as non-believers or misled Christians (Manalo, 1998). This exclusive doctrine has led to significant theological and relational tensions between INC and mainstream Christian denominations, particularly in the Philippines, where INC has many followers and considerable influence.

4.4.1 Foundational Beliefs of the Iglesia Ni Cristo

The doctrinal foundation of the INC centres around a unique interpretation of Christian history, particularly the belief that Felix Y Manalo (1886-1963), its founder, was the last messenger sent by God to restore the true church of Christ (Isaiah 41:9 and Isaiah 46:11 James Moffatt Version). According to INC, the true church disappeared and was lost to history after the apostles (Manalo, 1998). This belief is rooted in their perception of a great apostasy (II Thessalonians 2:8, 3 New American Standard Bible), during which they claim the true teachings of Christ were distorted, leading to a corruption of Christianity through false doctrines (Manalo, 1998). INC asserts that the restoration of the true church began with Manalo in 1914 (Manalo, 1998), a year INC marks the establishment of the reinstated true church. As the chosen one, Manalo claimed that he is the sole authority for interpreting the Scripture as he is the “Messenger in these Last Days”, “Bird of Prey”, and other similar title vested to various biblical figures (Isaiah 46:11 James Moffatt Version) (Manalo, 1998). They believe this church is the only valid representation of the true faith and the sole institution through which salvation can be obtained. INC teaches that membership to their group is essential for salvation (John 10:9, I Corinthians 12:27, Colossians 1:18). They contend that salvation is directly linked to being part of their movement, and anyone outside the church—regardless of their Christian affiliation or faith in Christ—is considered outside

the bounds of God's salvation (Manalo, 1998) (Ephesians 5:23, Deuteronomy 24:16, Revelations 20:14). This claim lies at the core of INC's theological stance, leading them to regard other Christian denominations, including Catholicism, Protestantism, and Eastern Orthodoxy, as false churches (Manalo, 1998) (Acts 20:28 George Lamsa Version). According to this view, those who are part of these other traditions are not true believers, and their salvation is not assured because they are not members of the true church established by Christ which has been re-established by Manalo in 1913/1914, despite Christ already established a church that even the power of hell will not prevail against it (Mattew 16:18). This INC’s logic makes Jesus Christ dishonest.

4.4.1.a The Role of Felix Y Manalo as the Last Messenger

The assertion that Manalo was the final messenger aligns with INC's exclusive interpretation of Scripture, which claims that no other church or religious leader after the apostles was able to restore the true church until Manalo's ministry in the early 20th century. Members of INC believe Manalo's teachings were divinely inspired and represent the only valid interpretation of Christianity, signifying the restored truth lost over the centuries. This belief positions INC outside the broader Christian tradition and deepens its doctrinal exclusivity. The teachings and leadership of Felix Y Manalo comprise the final revelation, making anyone who does not accept this understanding outside the realm of God's redemptive plan. Only Manalo and his ministers can interpret the Bible, as it is seen as a mystery despite its revelation (Romans 16:25).

4.4.1. b Salvation Through Iglesia Ni Cristo Alone

In INC, salvation is inseparable from membership in the church. The movement teaches that Christ's salvation can only be accessed through affiliation with Manalo's

established organisation (Manalo, 1998). INC posits that the church serves as the instrument of salvation, meaning that salvation is not solely a matter of personal faith or relationship with Christ; it is directly linked to being a part of the INC (Manalo, 1998). This ecclesiastical perspective places the group in a position of spiritual exclusivity, where only those within the church are deemed truly saved. INC goes as far as to state that no one can be saved outside of the church, which they believe is the only true institution authorised by God to facilitate the work of salvation (Manalo, 1998).

This view contrasts sharply with mainstream Christian teachings, which assert that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9), emphasising that the church is a community of believers gathered in Christ's name, rather than an institution that mediates salvation. By insisting that membership in a specific church is the key to salvation, conflicts with the biblical doctrine of justification by faith (Romans 3:28, Galatians 2:16). The INC's claim that salvation is confined to its members effectively alienates all other Christians and denies them the opportunity to experience the fullness of salvation, according to their theology (Manalo, 1998).

4.4.1.c The Denunciation of Other Christian Denominations

A critical element of the INC’s exclusivist theology is the rejection of all other Christian denominations (Manalo, 1998). The INC teaches that any church or religious organisation outside its own is a false church (Manalo, 1998). This includes Catholicism, Protestantism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and even smaller Christian sects. According to the INC, these churches have departed from the true faith and no longer represent the authentic teachings of Christ (Manalo, 1998). Consequently, adherents of these groups are considered spiritually lost and outside the possibility of salvation.

The INC uses selective readings of the Bible to support this claim, emphasising verses like Acts 4:12 ("Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved") and John 14:6 ("I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"). They also use Romans 16:16 and Acts 20:28 Lamsa Version to justify their exclusivity as their name is mentioned in the Bible particularly in the Lamsa Version (while they are denying the Deity of Jesus Christ), despite these names being written in common nouns instead of proper nouns, which suggests no specific organisation. All Christians from different denominations who follow God's law could be considered members of Christ's church, but not for Manalo. While these verses affirm that salvation is found only in Christ, the INC's interpretation limits access to salvation to their denomination, effectively declaring that Christ's redemptive work is solely available through them (Manalo, 1998). Also, they misunderstood the context that the church's name is immaterial in salvation, especially thousands of other churches are named "Church of Christ" globally. The salvation of all Christians who do not adhere to INC teachings is dismissed, as the movement claims that such individuals are following false doctrines.

This rejection of other Christian denominations is not only theologically harmful but also relationally divisive. It creates a spiritual separation that fractures the Christian community, placing barriers between believers in different traditions who share a common faith in Jesus Christ. Instead of fostering unity and collaboration, the INC's exclusivity promotes division, preventing the church from fulfilling the biblical mandate to be one body in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, Ephesians 4:3-6). However, the INC use these two verses to justify membership in their group as a prerequisite for salvation (Manalo, 1998).

4.5 Theological and Ecclesiological Consequences of INC's Beliefs

The doctrine of exclusive salvation promoted by the INC has significant theological and ecclesiological consequences that affect both the understanding of salvation and the unity of the Christian community. By asserting that membership in the INC is the only valid means of attaining salvation, the INC promotes a theological stance that undermines the universality of Christ's redemptive work. This exclusive claim contradicts the Bible's consistent teaching that salvation through Christ is available to all who believe, not limited to a specific sect or institution (John 3:16, Romans 10:9). Furthermore, the INC's doctrine disrupts the biblical understanding of justification by faith alone, framing salvation as a transactional process tied to church affiliation rather than as a matter of personal relationship with Christ.

In addition to its theological implications, this exclusivist perspective fosters significant division within the broader Christian body. The New Testament emphasises that the church should be a unified body of believers. Divisions along denominational lines, especially when one group claims exclusive access to salvation, contradict God's desire for unity within His Church (1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:3-6). The INC's sectarian view, in which all other Christian denominations are deemed false churches, not only undermines the unity of the Church but also hinders meaningful collaboration and fellowship among Christians who share common beliefs in Christ. This exclusivity creates an "us versus them" mentality, transforming believers from other Christian traditions into adversaries rather than recognising them as fellow members of the global body of Christ.

4.5.1 Diminishing the Universality of Christ's Redemptive Work

One of the most significant theological consequences of the INC's doctrine of exclusive salvation is its reduction of the universality of Christ's atoning sacrifice. According to the Bible, Christ's redemptive work—His death and resurrection—is a universal offer of salvation available to all who believe (Romans 10:9, John 3:16). The New Testament emphasises that salvation is a gift of grace available to every person, regardless of their background, ethnicity, or denominational affiliation. For instance, Romans 10:12-13 states, "For there is no distinction of the Jew and the Greek: for the same is Lord over all, rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved".

However, the INC's claim that only its members have access to salvation limits this universal offer by asserting that only their members can receive Christ's salvation. This stance undermines the inclusive nature of the gospel. It shifts the focus of salvation from being a matter of faith in Christ alone to being dependent on belonging to a particular group. Such a doctrinal position obscures the biblical doctrine of justification by faith. It reduces salvation to a transactional matter, where an individual's salvation depends on joining the correct denomination rather than having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Bible consistently teaches that salvation is not based on affiliation with any human institution but on faith in Christ's work on the cross. By making church membership the primary criterion for salvation, the INC distorts the biblical message of salvation by grace through faith. This exclusionary view limits the redemptive power of Christ's work

and disregards the global nature of the gospel, which is intended to reach every nation and people (Matthew 28:19, Revelation 7:9).

4.5.2 Obscuring Justification by Faith Alone

Including works for the Roman Catholic, the doctrine of justification by faith alone is a cornerstone of Christian theology. This principle teaches that individuals are declared righteous before God not based on their works or adherence to a specific religious institution but through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16). The Bible clearly states that salvation is a gift from God, received through faith—not through human effort or institutional affiliation (Ephesians 2:8-9).

When salvation is claimed to be accessible only through membership in the INC, the doctrine of justification by faith becomes obscured. In INC's theology, salvation is presented as a conditional process. Individuals are led to believe that they are saved by joining a specific movement rather than by placing their trust in Christ alone for their eternal security. This approach fosters spiritual uncertainty among believers, who may feel compelled to constantly prove their worthiness or maintain their membership in the institution to ensure their salvation, rather than resting in the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice.

Moreover, this teaching undermines the freedom and security that come from the understanding that salvation is a gift from God—not something to be earned through human affiliation. The system promoted by INC may lead to legalistic mindsets among Christians, who may focus more on church membership and doctrinal conformity than on cultivating a genuine relationship with Christ. This distorted view of salvation can

result in spiritual insecurity and a performance-based faith that detracts from the grace Christ offers freely to all who believe.

4.5.3 Disruptive Ecclesiology: Division and Isolation

The theological consequences of the INC's exclusivity also led to a disruptive ecclesiology, or understanding of the church, that fosters division and disunity within the broader Christian community. In the New Testament, the church is portrayed as one body of believers united in faith in Christ, with each member contributing to the whole (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, Ephesians 4:3-6). The unity of the Church is a central theme of Christian teaching, and Jesus Himself prayed for His followers to be one, as He and the Father are one (John 17:21).

However, the INC's doctrine of exclusive salvation creates spiritual division by insisting that only its members are truly saved. This belief dismisses other Christian denominations as false churches, effectively isolating believers in different faith traditions from one another. INC's sectarian stance undermines the unity of the body of Christ, preventing Christians from coming together across denominational lines for shared fellowship, worship, and collaboration in the gospel.

In practice, this division leads to a breakdown in relationships and ecumenical cooperation between denominations that share essential Christian beliefs in Christ's death and resurrection. Rather than fostering unity, the INC's theology promotes separation, creating an "us versus them" mentality that hinders efforts for unity within the body of Christ. The emphasis on exclusive salvation based on church membership

contradicts the biblical call for unity, where all believers, regardless of denominational affiliation, are called to be one in Christ.

4.5.4 Hindrance to the Global Mission of the Church

A significant consequence of the INC's exclusive salvation doctrine is its hindrance to the Church's global mission. The Bible teaches that the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) instructs Christians to go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them and teaching them to obey everything Christ commanded. The gospel message is intended to transcend all cultural, denominational, and geographic barriers and reach people from every tribe, language, and nation.

By insisting that only those within INC can attain salvation, the INC limits the scope of salvation and confines the Church's mission to a specific religious institution. This sectarian view effectively isolates the INC from other Christian denominations, creating barriers that hinder cooperation in global evangelistic efforts. Rather than collaborating with the larger body of Christ in the worldwide proclamation of the gospel, the INC's exclusive stance fosters a competitive and divisive approach to the mission, where their interpretation of salvation is considered the only legitimate path.

This division not only undermines the Church's universal mission but also contradicts the biblical teaching that salvation is available to all who trust in Christ (John 3:16). By restricting salvation to their own denomination, the INC's theology obstructs the global spread of the gospel. It discourages collaboration among believers from diverse traditions who could effectively work together to reach the world for Christ.

The doctrine of exclusive salvation promoted by the INC has significant theological and ecclesiological implications. Theologically, it undermines the universality of Christ's redemptive work and obscures the biblical teaching of justification by faith alone. Ecclesiologically, it creates divisions within the body of Christ, weakening the unity of believers and obstructing meaningful collaboration among Christian denominations. By limiting salvation to church membership, the INC distorts the essence of salvation, turning it into an institutional transaction rather than a personal relationship with Christ. The Bible calls Christians to unite in Christ and to proclaim the gospel to all nations rather than to divide themselves along sectarian lines. The INC's exclusive salvation doctrine not only disrupts the unity of the Church but also impedes its global mission to make disciples of all people. The gospel of grace is meant to unite people, not divide them, and the Church must strive for unity, as God has called all believers to be one in Christ.

4.6 Impact on Christian Unity and Relational Harm

The doctrine of exclusive salvation promoted by INC has significant implications for both individuals and Christian communities as a whole. The belief that the INC is the only true church, and that salvation can only be attained through membership in this specific group creates substantial divisions between INC members and other Christians. This exclusivity fosters an "us versus them" mentality, leading INC members to view those outside the organisation as spiritually lost or condemned. This belief isolates INC members from other believers and has serious relational consequences that affect both personal relationships and the wider Christian community.

4.6.1. Division and Isolation within the Christian Community

The INC believes that it alone represents the true church, which leads to the estrangement of its members from the wider Christian community. When followers are taught that salvation depends solely on membership in the INC, they may perceive other Christians—whether Catholic, Protestant, or from other denominations—as false believers. This division extends beyond theological disputes and results in real-world relational consequences. Coincident of their sect's exclusivity, INC members may feel compelled to distance themselves from friends or family who belong to other Christian traditions, creating social fragmentation where doctrinal differences undermine personal relationships.

For example, tensions may arise within families when one member leaves the INC. The rest of the family, who still belong to the INC, begins to view their former member as spiritually lost and will be condemned in the lake fire. Individuals who leave the INC are expelled publicly in their worship services, creating fearmongering among their members. This division can lead to emotional distress, as family members who once shared common faith and values are now seen as outsiders or damned in hell. The harm of such a mindset is not only theological, but deeply relational, fracturing the bonds of love and support that are essential in Christian communities.

Moreover, the sense of spiritual superiority fostered within the INC, where members believe they are the only true Christians, hinders genuine engagement and dialogue with other believers. Rather than seeing others as fellow believers in Christ, they are often regarded as misguided or spiritually deficient. This exclusionary attitude

diminishes the ability of the broader church to work collaboratively towards shared goals, such as evangelism, social justice, and Christian unity.

4.6.2 Spiritual Manipulation and Emotional Harm

The exclusive claim to salvation made by INC can lead to spiritual manipulation. In such groups, members are often taught that their salvation hinges on complete conformity to the church's teachings and unwavering loyalty to the movement. This creates an environment where questioning the authority of the church or deviating from its doctrines is not only discouraged but often punished. The pressure to conform can be intense, as followers are led to believe that failing to adhere strictly to the INC's teachings jeopardises their eternal destiny.

This pressure can result in spiritual abuse, where followers are manipulated into blind obedience to church leaders. The fear of eternal damnation for not following the INC's teachings can leave followers feeling spiritually insecure and filled with guilt. The lack of spiritual freedom exacerbates this situation, as members are taught that leaving the church or questioning its doctrines will lead to eternal condemnation.

The emotional and psychological toll on individuals can be severe. Followers may experience feelings of inadequacy, shame, and guilt, believing they are spiritually inferior if they cannot perfectly conform to the group's doctrines and practices. Over time, this can lead to spiritual exhaustion, where individuals must constantly prove their worth to God and their leaders. This creates an atmosphere of legalism and self-doubt. Many individuals may even suffer from anxiety, depression, and spiritual

burnout as a result of the overwhelming pressure to adhere to an exclusive doctrine that claims salvation is only available through their specific group.

4.6.3 Relational Damage and Psychological Impact

The relational consequences of sectarian exclusivity extend beyond mere theological differences, resulting in long-lasting emotional and psychological harm. In families, the impact can be particularly severe. When a family member joins the INC, they may begin to view their loved ones in other Christian traditions with disdain or pity, believing these family members are spiritually lost. This mindset creates a barrier to healthy, loving relationships, as the INC member is often taught to prioritise their allegiance to the church and its leaders over their familial bonds, regarding those outside the group as spiritually inferior.

Moreover, emotional manipulation can occur when INC members are repeatedly reminded of the eternal stakes associated with their belief system. The threat of eternal damnation for not adhering to the church's teachings can instil fear and isolation, discouraging individuals from seeking support or advice outside the church. This emotional manipulation is frequently reinforced by church leaders, who may characterise any external relationships as spiritually dangerous. Consequently, this manipulation further isolates followers and prevents them from seeking help or counsel beyond the group. The fear of being ostracised or excommunicated for questioning or leaving the group can trap individuals in a cycle of spiritual abuse and emotional harm.

4.6.4 Hindrance to Christian Unity: Contradicting the Biblical Mandate

The sectarian exclusivity promoted by the INC contradicts the biblical mandate for the church to be a community of grace and a witness to the world. Jesus Himself called

for His followers to be unified and loving toward one another, as in John 13:34-35: "A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another". Rather than fostering fellowship and mutual encouragement, the INC's exclusivist views create division, turning the church into a fragmented and isolated group. This isolation is contrary to the gospel message of reconciliation and unity, which is the central theme in both the New Testament and the teachings of Christ. Instead of being a unified body of believers, the church becomes a divided community, where the focus shifts from love, grace, and shared faith to doctrinal purity and institutional loyalty.

The unified witness of the church is compromised when Christians are taught to view others—who share a common faith in Christ—as false believers or spiritually inadequate. Christian unity is meant to testify to the world about Christ's love and the gospel's transformative power. In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus teaches His followers that they are to be the light of the world, shining brightly before others so that their good deeds bring glory to God. The sectarian view of salvation promoted by the INC diminishes the witness of the global church, replacing Christ's unifying love with division and exclusion.

4.6.5 Spiritual Damage and Disruption of Christian Fellowship

The exclusivity promoted by the INC fosters division within the broader Christian community, resulting in spiritual harm and disruption of genuine Christian fellowship. Instead of encouraging mutual edification and collaboration among believers, their teachings create an environment of suspicion and disdain. This relational damage

hinders the church's ability to act as a community of grace, where believers support one another in their faith and work together to fulfil the Great Commission.

The INC's narrow view of the body of Christ undermines the global Christian witness by preventing believers from collaborating with other Christians who share common beliefs in the gospel's essentials. Their exclusive claims about salvation prioritise division and strict doctrinal boundaries over Christ's transformative work, which should unite all believers, regardless of their denomination or background.

4.7 Cross-Case Analysis: Identifying Common Patterns and Variations

A cross-case analysis identifies and compares patterns, trends, and variations across multiple case studies. It is particularly effective in examining theological doctrines like exclusive salvation claims among different religious groups, such as the INC. This analysis highlights common themes and differences in how groups interpret scripture, doctrinal positions, and relational dynamics.

4.7.1 Common Patterns

4.7.1.a Emphasis on Human Authority

Sectarian groups often centralise authority in a leader or governing body, which shapes their theology. For example, the INC regards Felix Y Manalo as the last messenger, while Jehovah's Witnesses follow the Watch Tower Society. Such focus on human authority often places leaders' teachings above scripture.

4.7.1.b Selective Interpretation of Key Scriptures

Groups like the INC and Jehovah's Witnesses frequently cite specific Bible verses, such as Acts 4:12 and John 14:6, to assert that salvation is only through their

denomination. This selective interpretation overlooks broader biblical teachings about salvation through faith in Christ alone.

4.7.1.c Division and Exclusivity

Sectarian movements create sharp divisions between themselves and other Christian groups, often labelling them as false churches. This mentality fosters an "us versus them" attitude, leading to a belief that only their members are truly saved.

4.7.1.d Institutionalised Salvation

Many sectarian groups frame salvation as contingent upon membership rather than a personal relationship with Christ. For instance, the INC views the church as the sole means of salvation, promoting and focussing on conformity rather than the grace of faith in Jesus Christ.

4.7.2 Variations Among Sectarian Groups Claiming Exclusive Salvation

Sectarian groups that claim exclusive salvation exhibit notable differences in their interpretation of doctrine and interaction with other Christian communities.

4.7.2.a Role of Scripture and Extra-Biblical Revelations

These groups vary in their use of Scripture and additional texts. For instance, the INC emphasises Felix Y Manalo's writings as authoritative alongside the Bible. At the same time, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints includes the Book of Mormon as part of their scripture. In contrast, many Protestant denominations adhere to sola scriptura, considering Scripture the sole authority. This variation illustrates how groups support their exclusive salvation claims through human writings or additional texts.

4.7.2.b Degree of Separation

The level of separation from other Christian denominations also differs. INC instructs members to avoid fellowship with non-INC Christians, viewing them as spiritually harmful. Other groups may permit some interaction while claiming to be the only true church. This separation ranges from complete isolation to limited engagement with broader Christian communities.

4.7.2.c Theological Emphasis

Sectarian groups vary in their focus on theological points. Jehovah's Witnesses emphasise the Kingdom of God and future events, while the INC highlights the restoration of the true church. Others might concentrate on personal holiness or doctrinal purity. These differences reveal varied conceptualisations of salvation and church authority among these groups.

4.7.2.d Church Rituals and Practices

These groups often have distinctive rituals that set them apart. The INC emphasises baptism as essential for salvation and has specific membership requirements. Other sects may prioritise different sacraments or rites, reinforcing the belief that salvation is accessed through church practices rather than personal faith alone.

4.7.3 Comparative Reflection

While these sectarian groups share the theme of exclusive salvation, they significantly differ in doctrinal details and theological emphasis. These differences often stem from the beliefs of their founders and their interpretations of Scripture. The degree of separation from wider Christian traditions varies, with some being more insular and

others engaging with different Christian groups. Such exclusivity can create relational harm within the body of Christ and impede the collaborative witness of Christians in the world.

4.8 Conclusion

The case studies and analyses in Chapter 4 emphasise the significant theological and relational consequences of selective preaching and exclusive claims of salvation. Examining sermons on social justice, wealth, and racial equality illustrates how the selective use of Scripture can distort the understanding of biblical teachings. Focusing on specific themes while neglecting others can lead to a superficial view of justice, a materialistic mindset, and an inability to address deeper issues of reconciliation and repentance.

The case study on prosperity theology exemplifies how concentrating on verses that promise material blessings while disregarding broader biblical teachings on wealth, suffering, and contentment can distort the gospel message. Such selective preaching encourages a materialistic attitude and can result in disillusionment and guilt among believers who do not experience the promised prosperity.

The analysis of the INC and other sectarian groups highlights the dangers associated with exclusive claims of salvation. These groups frequently use selective interpretations of Scripture to assert that salvation is attainable only through their specific denomination, leading to division and isolation within the Christian community. This exclusivity undermines the universality of Christ's redemptive work, obscures the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and hinders the Church's global mission.

Overall, the chapter highlights the importance of a balanced and comprehensive approach to preaching that accurately represents the whole counsel of Scripture. By addressing both individual and collective aspects of justice, wealth, and salvation, preachers can foster a more holistic understanding of the gospel that promotes unity, spiritual growth, and a deeper relationship with God.

CHAPTER V – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CULTIVATING THEOLOGICALLY INFORMED CONGREGATIONS

5.1 Emphasising Expository Preaching

Expository preaching systematically explores and explains Scripture in its original context, fostering a theologically informed congregation. This method emphasises fidelity to the biblical text, helping congregants understand God's Word and its application to their lives (Robinson, 2014). Unlike topical preaching, which focuses on isolated verses, expository preaching examines entire passages, ensuring a holistic communication of the Scripture.

5.1.1 Contextual Integrity

One significant benefit of expository preaching is its focus on contextual integrity (Martin, 2022). Preachers avoid misinterpretation by considering a passage's historical, cultural, and literary context. For example, Jeremiah 29:11 should be understood within God's covenant with Israel during their exile, not as a blanket promise for individual prosperity. This helps congregants grasp the broader narrative of Scripture and its relevance to their faith. This method also equips listeners to apply biblical principles to contemporary issues like social justice or personal suffering by engaging with themes of justice, mercy, and sovereignty found in books like Amos or Habakkuk.

5.1.2 Presenting the Full Counsel of God

Expository preaching covers the entirety of Scripture, exposing congregants to a range of theological themes and biblical genres. Preachers who work through books of the

Bible avoid focusing only on their personal preferences, creating a balanced theological understanding. This promotes theological literacy, helping believers tackle complex topics confidently. Additionally, this approach addresses difficult subjects found in books like 1 Corinthians or Leviticus, broadening the congregation's perspective and modelling humility in interpreting Scripture.

5.1.3 Encouraging Personal Bible Study

Expository preaching also fosters personal Bible study by demonstrating how to interpret Scripture systematically (Whiston, 1952). Preachers highlight the structure and themes of passages, providing tools for congregants to engage with the Bible individually. For instance, a study of Ephesians shows how the early chapters on salvation connect to practical exhortations in later chapters. This method encourages a holistic approach to Scripture and fosters a love for its relevance, leading to greater spiritual maturity and a deeper relationship with God.

5.1.4 Addressing Cultural and Theological Challenges

In today's world of rising biblical illiteracy and cultural confusion, expository preaching is essential for helping congregations tackle complex moral and theological issues. By focusing sermons on Scripture, preachers empower congregants to confront contemporary challenges with a biblical lens. For example, when discussing gender identity, racial justice, or ethical concerns in technology, expository preaching pulls from the entire Bible to create a strong theological base. A sermon series on Genesis can delve into humanity being made in God's image, while a study of James might examine how faith influences social justice. This approach provides believers with a

solid framework to counter secular views and encourages them to think critically and act faithfully.

5.1.5 Nurturing Spiritual Transformation

Expository preaching not only informs but also transforms spiritually. By delivering the entire message of Scripture, preachers help congregants experience God's Word as a dynamic force that impacts their lives (Hebrews 4:12). Regular exposure to expository sermons encourages believers to align their values and actions with biblical teachings. They adopt a Christ-centred worldview, guided by God's sovereignty, grace, and love. This transformation deepens as congregants apply these teachings within their community, supporting each other in living out the gospel.

5.2 Prioritising Theological Education

Theological education is essential for developing spiritually mature and informed congregations (Shaw, 2014). It provides structured learning opportunities that enable church members to engage deeply with Scripture, think critically, and apply biblical principles to their lives.

5.2.1 Foundational Doctrinal Teaching

Churches should offer classes on core Christian doctrines, including the nature of God, the person and work of Christ, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the authority of Scripture (Vaughn, 2019). Classes on the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds can help believers understand Christian orthodoxy, while systematic theology courses can delve into justification, sanctification, and eschatology. This foundational knowledge equips congregants to navigate spiritual challenges confidently.

5.2.2 Engagement with Church History

Exploring church history allows congregants to see their faith within a larger narrative (Brettler et al., 2012). Studying key events like early church councils and the Reformation helps believers grasp how theology has evolved and continues to impact Christianity today, such as the Council of Nicaea explains the doctrine of the Trinity, while the Protestant Reformation emphasises sola scriptura and justification by faith.

5.2.3 Apologetics and Evangelism

Theological education should prepare congregants for apologetics and evangelism (Sivasubramanian, 2019). Classes can address common objections to Christianity, such as the problem of evil or the reliability of Scripture. Workshops can cover topics like creation and science, the resurrection, and the New Testament's historical reliability, empowering believers to share their faith confidently.

5.2.4 Integrating Theology into Daily Life

Theology should connect with daily living. Practical courses on Christian ethics, spiritual disciplines, and vocational theology help believers see how faith influences their decisions and work (Plantak, 2017). Classes on biblical stewardship can teach generosity and integrity, while studies on spiritual disciplines explore prayer and meditation. Churches enable congregants to live their faith meaningfully by relating theology to real-life situations.

5.3 Encouraging Small Group Discipleship

Small group discipleship is essential for spiritual growth and community building in congregations. These groups enable believers to study Scripture, share insights, and hold one another accountable, fostering a strong environment for discipleship.

5.3.1 Building Relational and Spiritual Connections

Small groups foster deep relationships among members, which are essential for spiritual growth. They create an intimate space for encouragement, support, and accountability. Participants share struggles and victories framed by biblical principles (Galatians 6:2). This model mirrors the early church's practice of meeting for prayer, study, and fellowship (Acts 2:42-47), promoting a strong sense of belonging.

5.3.2 Facilitating In-Depth Biblical Engagement

Small groups enable a more thorough exploration of Scripture compared to larger groups. Members can focus on specific passages, themes, or theological questions flexibly. For instance, studying Ephesians can address themes like unity and grace, while topical studies can tackle practical issues. This deeper engagement helps participants apply biblical principles in their lives.

5.3.3 Developing Leadership and Multiplication

Small group discipleship helps develop church leaders by encouraging members to facilitate discussions and coordinate activities. Churches can identify potential leaders within these groups and provide training and mentorship. Additionally, as groups grow, they can split to form new ones, increasing the church's reach and fulfilling the mandate to make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20).

5.3.4 Encouraging Accountability and Application

These groups create a space for accountability, encouraging members to live out their faith. Individuals can share struggles and set spiritual goals, receiving support from one another (Osisioma, 2013). For example, while studying James 1:22-25, a group might identify specific actions to demonstrate their faith, fostering a culture of spiritual maturity and intentionality through regular check-ins.

5.3.5 Strategies for Effective Small Groups

Effective small groups succeed when leaders are equipped with theological knowledge, facilitation skills, and mentorship (Markham, 2010). A structured curriculum—like study guides or sermon-based materials—helps keep discussions focused. Promoting diversity within groups enhances conversations by including members of different ages and backgrounds. Additionally, establishing safe spaces is essential for participants to share openly without judgment.

5.4 Promoting Personal Bible Study and Devotional Practices

Personal Bible study and devotional practices are crucial for spiritual growth, alongside corporate worship and small group discipleship. Engaging individually with Scripture helps believers build a personal relationship with God and develop sustainable faith habits.

5.4.1 The Importance of Personal Bible Study

Personal Bible study allows believers to connect directly with God's Word at their own pace, focusing on specific areas of interest. This deep engagement helps internalise biblical truths, providing strength and guidance in daily life (Psalm 119:105). It also

fosters spiritual discernment as believers learn to interpret Scripture independently, enhancing their understanding and accuracy in handling God's Word (2 Timothy 2:15).

5.4.2 Cultivating Devotional Practices

Devotional practices like prayer, meditation, and journaling are essential for a vibrant spiritual life. They allow individuals to reflect on God's character, align their hearts with His will, and seek guidance. For instance, prayer deepens intimacy with God, allowing for expression of needs and worship. Meditation enhances appreciation for Scripture, helping individuals focus on key verses and journaling aids in processing insights and tracking personal growth over time. These practices collectively support believers through challenges and strengthen their relationship with God.

5.4.3 Encouraging Personal Engagement with Scripture

Churches can enhance personal engagement with Scripture by offering study Bibles and reading plans for all skill levels. Workshops on hermeneutics can help people interpret and apply Scripture in daily life. Pastors should share their own Bible study and prayer experiences to highlight the importance of personal devotional practices.

5.4.4 Addressing Barriers to Engagement

Believers often face barriers like time constraints and lack of confidence. Churches can help by encouraging short and manageable study sessions, offering introductory resources for new learners, and pairing less experienced individuals with mentors (Mannerfelt, 2022). By addressing these barriers, churches can foster an environment where personal Bible study and devotion become accessible to all.

5.4.5 Integrating Personal Study with Corporate Worship

Personal Bible study should enhance the corporate worship experience. Preachers can encourage congregants to study the weekly sermon text in advance, providing context and reflection questions. Small group leaders can incorporate personal study into discussions, linking individual learning with shared exploration.

5.5 Encouraging Critical Thinking and Dialogue

Encouraging critical thinking and dialogue in congregations is crucial for developing a mature faith. Engaging with Scripture, asking questions, and exploring different perspectives helps believers navigate complex theological and cultural issues (Schade, 2024). A church that values critical thinking empowers congregants to seek truth, address challenging questions, and grow spiritually through meaningful conversations.

5.5.1 Promoting a Culture of Inquiry

To foster critical thinking, churches should create a culture of inquiry. Pastors and leaders need to show that questioning is a valuable part of faith. For example, implementing Q&A sessions after sermons or hosting discussion forums allows congregants to engage with theological topics. This normalises inquiry and combats the notion that questioning equates to weak faith. For instance, discussing concepts like reconciling God's justice with His mercy or examining contemporary ethical issues encourages deeper thought and scriptural understanding.

5.5.2 Teaching Hermeneutical Skills

Teaching congregants hermeneutical skills enhances critical thinking. Churches can offer workshops on biblical hermeneutics to help participants understand the historical and cultural context of Scripture, identify literary genres and their meanings, and cross-reference passages for a comprehensive view of biblical themes (Trentham, 2023). For instance, analysing parables in the Gospels with attention to their audience and setting can improve interpretation. Additionally, discussing multiple interpretations of challenging passages, like predestination versus free will, broadens understanding of various theological viewpoints.

5.5.3 Encouraging Dialogue on Contemporary Issues

Critical thinking is vital for discussing contemporary cultural and ethical issues. Churches should provide safe spaces for conversations on topics like social justice, gender identity, and environmental stewardship. Leaders should guide these discussions to keep them respectful and focused on Scripture while welcoming diverse viewpoints. For example, a panel on climate change might explore stewardship in Genesis and practical steps for environmental care, connecting real-world challenges with biblical principles.

5.5.4 Modelling Humility and Openness

Pastors and leaders must model humility and openness when addressing questions and differing perspectives. Acknowledging theological mysteries and debates allows for firm convictions while remaining open to discussion. For instance, leaders can invite exploration of different eschatological views while fostering unity in diversity.

5.5.5 Strategies for Implementation

Churches can implement critical thinking initiatives by using practical strategies such as hosting discussion groups to explore theological topics and share insights. They can also offer workshops and seminars on apologetics, ethics, and theological controversies. Additionally, incorporating case studies that utilise real-life scenarios or biblical narratives can encourage thoughtful application of faith.

5.6 Leveraging Technology and Media

Technology and media are essential tools for improving theological education, spiritual growth, and congregational engagement. By effectively utilising these resources, churches can reach more people, offer diverse learning opportunities, and help believers navigate their faith in a digital age.

5.6.1 Expanding Access to Biblical Resources

Technology allows churches to share a variety of biblical resources, such as study tools, devotional content, and sermon archives. Congregants can access sermon recordings and transcripts, customised Bible study guides and reading plans, and theological articles, podcasts, and videos on relevant topics through church websites, apps, and social media (O'Lynn, 2023). For instance, a church app could feature daily devotionals, links to trusted commentaries, and interactive quizzes to promote Scripture engagement. This accessibility supports spiritual growth for congregants regardless of their circumstances.

5.6.2 Facilitating Virtual Community

Churches can create virtual communities that complement in-person gatherings via platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Members can participate in virtual Bible studies across different locations, online prayer groups for sharing requests, webinars, and live discussions on spiritual topics. For example, hosting an online Q&A with a theologian allows real-time question submissions, fostering connection and learning beyond physical boundaries.

5.6.3 Engaging Younger Generations

Younger generations, who prefer digital platforms, can be engaged through short video devotionals breaking down biblical concepts, inspirational social media posts and Scripture graphics, and interactive polls or quizzes on theological subjects (Jeffress, 2008). Creating a 60-second video series on key doctrines can capture their attention and encourage deeper exploration of faith-related topics.

5.6.4 Addressing Barriers to Participation

Technology can also make church content accessible to a broader audience. For those with disabilities or time constraints, digital resources provide flexible engagement options, such as closed captioning for videos that aid individuals with hearing impairments and on-demand resources that cater to busy individuals. By prioritising accessibility, churches ensure that everyone can participate in spiritual growth.

5.6.5 Equipping Believers for Digital Evangelism

Technology offers new avenues for evangelism. Churches can train members to use social media to share their faith and promote church events. This includes encouraging

members to share church content within their networks and providing online tools to help believers effectively discuss their faith with others. Using technology for evangelism helps fulfil the Great Commission innovatively.

5.6.6 Mitigating Risks of Technology Use

While there are many benefits, potential challenges like screen fatigue and misinformation must be addressed. Churches should promote healthy digital habits, balance online and in-person engagement, and vet shared resources to ensure alignment with biblical truth.

5.7 Developing Pastoral Accountability and Training

Accountability and training for pastors are crucial for ethical leadership, promoting spiritual growth, and preparing them to lead their congregations effectively in a changing cultural and theological environment.

5.7.1 Establishing Accountability Structures

Pastoral accountability starts with clear structures that ensure transparency and ethical leadership aligned with the church's mission (Osisioma, 2013). Elder boards or leadership teams provide oversight and collaborative decision-making, helping pastors navigate challenges aligned with biblical values. Peer accountability groups offer a safe discussion, encouragement, and prayer space. Regular evaluations allow pastors to reflect on their goals, assess effectiveness, and receive constructive feedback for growth.

5.7.2 Fostering Ethical and Moral Integrity

Ethical and moral integrity is crucial for pastoral leadership (McKay & Whitehouse, 2015). To combat pressures that lead to burnout or misconduct, churches should offer counselling and support for stress management. Clear boundaries in financial management, social interactions, and personal conduct help maintain trust and integrity within the congregation. Prioritising these measures creates a culture that upholds biblical standards of accountability and moral excellence.

5.7.3 Promoting Continuous Theological and Practical Training

Ongoing education helps pastors effectively tackle emerging theological and cultural issues (Handley, 2024). Attending conferences and workshops deepens their understanding of Scripture and contemporary challenges. Online courses or seminary programs facilitate lifelong learning while pastors support their ministries. Practical training in leadership and communication enhances their ability to serve diverse congregations, ensuring they are prepared for the community's dynamic needs.

5.7.4 Mentorship and Succession Planning

Mentorship is vital for ministry growth (Wakeman, 2012). Experienced leaders can guide younger pastors, sharing insights and modelling Christlike leadership. Formal mentorship programs promote intentional discipleship and prepare future leaders. Succession planning ensures smooth leadership transitions aligned with the church's long-term vision by identifying and equipping emerging leaders.

5.7.5 Benefits of Accountability and Training

Investing in pastoral accountability and training offers substantial benefits. Accountable leaders maintain vibrant spiritual lives, lead with humility, and build trust within their communities. Continuous training equips them to address theological and cultural challenges effectively. These practices foster a healthy, Christ-centred church where leaders and congregants thrive spiritually, emotionally, and relationally.

5.8 Integrating Theology into Worship and Ministry

Integrating theology into worship and ministry ensures that every aspect of church life reflects biblical truths, enriching congregational worship and aligning ministry efforts with God's purposes.

5.8.1 Theological Foundations in Worship

Integrating theology into worship ensures that each part of the service reflects biblical truths and supports spiritual growth. Music plays a vital role, as theologically rich songs help congregants connect with God's character. Scripture readings, prayers, and confessions should align with the sermon and liturgical calendar, emphasising the importance of God's Word. Preaching must be rooted in sound theology, inspiring worship while equipping congregants for daily life. This approach engages the heart, mind, and soul, linking theology with spiritual practice.

5.8.2 Theological Integration in Ministries

From children's programs to community outreach, every church ministry should be informed by theology. Teaching core doctrines like creation and redemption builds a strong faith foundation in children's ministry. Youth ministry should tackle

contemporary issues, offering biblical insights on identity and justice. Outreach programs like food banks should reflect God's call for justice and mercy, showing that service is an expression of faith. Grounding all ministries in theological principles ensures alignment with God's purposes and effectively conveys His love.

5.8.3 Aligning Church Practices with Theological Convictions

Church governance and operations must embody theological values. Sacraments like baptism and communion should emphasise their biblical significance, focusing on grace, covenant, and unity themes. Stewardship should teach generosity and responsible resource use as acts of worship. Decision-making should be grounded in humility, Scripture reliance, and commitment to the church's mission. Aligning practices with theology reinforces the church's identity as a Christ-centred community dedicated to God's Word.

5.8.4 Equipping Congregants to Live Theologically

Theological integration goes beyond church programs, empowering congregants to apply biblical principles in everyday life. Vocational theology helps believers view their work as a way to glorify God. Teaching ethical decision-making on relationships, politics, and social justice enables congregants to navigate complex issues wisely. Discipleship and evangelism efforts must focus on sharing the gospel and living as witnesses to Christ. Equipping believers in these areas prepares them to live out their faith authentically.

5.8.5 The Transformative Power of Theologically Informed Ministry

Integrating theology into worship and ministry transforms individuals and the church community. Worship becomes an encounter with God's truth, while ministry reflects the gospel's call to serve. Congregants deepen their understanding of Scripture, grow closer to God, and live with purpose. This integration strengthens the church's witness, showcasing the relevance of theology in life. By prioritising theology, churches create an environment that fosters spiritual growth and advances God's kingdom.

5.9 Conclusion

Chapter 5 recommends building theologically informed congregations through expository preaching and promoting personal Bible study. It emphasises strong theological education in essential doctrines, church history, and Christian ethics while encouraging small-group discipleship for deeper engagement and leadership development.

The chapter also highlights the importance of personal Bible study and devotional practices in strengthening individual faith and corporate worship. It advocates for critical thinking and open discussions, alongside utilising technology for biblical resources. Pastoral accountability and ongoing training are crucial for effective ministry, focusing on integrating theology into worship to foster spiritual growth and create a mature, unified church community.

CHAPTER VI – THEOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Upholding Theological Integrity in Doctrine and Practice

6.1.1 The Role of Doctrine in Shaping Faith

Theological integrity in doctrine is essential for safeguarding the church's faith. Doctrine serves as the framework through which believers understand the character of God, the work of Christ, the role of the Holy Spirit, and the implications of the gospel for daily living. When doctrine is faithfully taught and upheld, it enables congregants to build their faith on a solid foundation, as emphasised in 2 Timothy 2:15: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth".

However, compromising theological integrity can lead to confusion, spiritual stagnation, and doctrinal error. For instance, overemphasising certain aspects of theology—like grace without accountability or justice without mercy—can distort the gospel message. Faithful preaching must strive for balance, presenting the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27) in a way that reflects the richness and depth of Scripture.

6.1.2 Practical Implications of Theological Integrity

Theological integrity also manifests in how doctrine is applied in practice. For example, a church that teaches about God's love for the marginalised must reflect this truth through its ministries by actively engaging in social justice, mercy, and care for the vulnerable. Similarly, a church that emphasises God's holiness should encourage its members to pursue lives of personal holiness and moral integrity.

Pastors play a pivotal role in modelling and teaching this coherence between belief and practice. They must demonstrate how theology informs everyday decisions, including relationships, work ethics, and community engagement. By doing so, pastors not only teach sound doctrine but also illustrate its transformative power in real-world contexts.

6.1.3 Challenges to Theological Integrity

Upholding theological integrity requires vigilance against the pressures of cultural relativism, consumerism, and individualism that can dilute biblical truths. For example, some preachers may feel tempted to prioritise popularity over faithfulness, offering messages that appeal to cultural trends rather than addressing the more challenging truths of Scripture. To counteract this, churches must emphasise rigorous biblical study, accountability structures, and a commitment to Christ-centred teaching.

Furthermore, theological integrity demands humility and a willingness to learn. Pastors should be open to constructive feedback, willing to re-examine their interpretations, and committed to lifelong learning. This posture strengthens their preaching and fosters an environment of mutual growth and discipleship within the congregation.

6.2 Ethical Responsibilities of Preachers

6.2.1 The Sacred Trust of Preaching

Preaching is one of the most sacred responsibilities entrusted to pastors, requiring both spiritual discernment and ethical integrity. Preachers are called to faithfully proclaim God's Word, as highlighted in 2 Timothy 4:2: "Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season: reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine". This

sacred trust demands a commitment to truth, humility, and service, ensuring that sermons are not driven by personal agendas but are rooted in Scripture and aimed at edifying the congregation.

One of the primary ethical responsibilities of preachers is to handle Scripture with integrity. This includes thorough exegesis, respect for the biblical context, and careful application of theological principles. Preachers must resist the temptation to cherry-pick verses or manipulate texts to support their viewpoints, as such practices distort the gospel and mislead the congregation. Ethical preaching requires a commitment to truth, even when challenging cultural norms or personal biases (Plantak, 2017).

6.2.2 Ethical Leadership and Personal Conduct

Ethical responsibilities extend beyond the pulpit to encompass the personal conduct of preachers. As leaders within the church, pastors are held to high standards of moral integrity, as their lives serve as examples for the congregation. A preacher's character—demonstrated through humility, honesty, and accountability—is integral to their credibility and effectiveness in ministry.

Preachers must also prioritise relational integrity, treating congregants with respect, compassion, and dignity. This includes avoiding favouritism, manipulation, or exploitation in pastoral relationships. Ethical leadership demands transparency in decision-making, wise stewardship of church resources, and a commitment to fairness and justice in all interactions.

6.2.3 Preaching with Courage and Compassion

Ethical preaching also involves addressing complex topics with courage and compassion. Preachers must not shy away from subjects such as sin, repentance, or injustice, even if these messages may be uncomfortable or unpopular. However, such sermons should be delivered with grace and God's sensibility, emphasising God's love and redemption alongside His holiness and justice (Robinson, 2014).

Balancing truth and compassion are crucial when dealing with sensitive issues in the congregation. Sermons on topics like forgiveness, reconciliation, or social ethics should acknowledge differing emotions and views while staying rooted in Scripture. Ethical preaching aims to guide and inspire the community, promoting unity and growth instead of condemnation or division.

6.2.4 Accountability and Transparency in Ministry

To uphold their ethical responsibilities, preachers must embrace accountability within the church and the broader Christian community (Osisioma, 2013). Regular evaluations, peer mentorship, and open communication with church leadership provide reflection, growth, and correction opportunities. Preachers should also cultivate a spirit of humility, acknowledging their limitations and seeking counsel when faced with challenging situations. Transparency is another key aspect of ethical ministry. Preaches must demonstrate honesty and integrity in financial decisions, theological stances, or personal behaviour. This transparency builds trust within the congregation and reflects the character of Christ, who modelled servant leadership and sacrificial love.

6.2.5 The Impact of Ethical Preaching on Congregations

Ethical preaching has a profound impact on congregations' spiritual health and growth. When preachers lead with integrity and humility, they inspire trust, foster unity, and encourage congregants to deepen their faith. Conversely, a lack of ethical accountability can lead to disillusionment, division, and spiritual harm. Preachers prioritising ethical responsibilities create an environment where truth, love, and grace thrive, enabling the church to fulfil its mission as the body of Christ.

6.3 The Role of Hermeneutical Education in Preaching Ministry

Hermeneutical education is crucial for preachers, as it provides them with the skills needed to interpret Scripture accurately and apply its teachings to modern life (Sommers, 2007). By using sound hermeneutical principles, preachers can connect the ancient biblical text with contemporary contexts, ensuring that their sermons are both theologically accurate and practically relevant.

6.3.1 Foundational Importance of Hermeneutics in Preaching

Hermeneutics, the art and science of biblical interpretation, is essential for the preaching ministry (Kinsella, 2006) . At its core, hermeneutics provides the necessary tools to discern the meaning of Scripture within its historical, cultural, and literary contexts. Preachers tasked with conveying God's Word must be equipped to interpret Scripture accurately. This ensures that their sermons reflect the intended message of the biblical text rather than personal biases or contemporary agendas. Developing this foundational skill enables preachers to bridge the gap between the Bible's ancient world and their congregations' present-day realities.

Effective hermeneutical education provides preachers with a disciplined approach to interpreting Scripture. For instance, understanding the historical context of Isaiah 7:14—viewing it as a prophecy with immediate implications for Israel and its ultimate fulfilment in Christ—deepens the theological richness of the text. Similarly, recognising the poetic structure of the Psalms or the parabolic style of Jesus' teachings allows preachers to approach each passage with the appropriate methods of interpretation. Hermeneutical education helps avoid errors such as proof-texting or misapplication, fostering sermons that honour the depth and complexity of Scripture.

6.3.2 Building Theological and Cultural Bridges

Hermeneutical education also empowers preachers to build bridges between biblical theology and contemporary culture(Vaughn, 2013). Although Scripture was written in specific historical and cultural contexts, its truths remain timeless and relevant. Preachers must navigate this tension by interpreting the text faithfully while applying its principles to modern issues. For example, a sermon on Micah 6:8 might address the ancient Israelite call to justice while drawing parallels to contemporary challenges such as racial inequality or environmental stewardship.

Equipping preachers with hermeneutical tools enables them to engage thoughtfully with cultural shifts and ethical dilemmas, providing biblically grounded responses to the questions their congregations face. This ability is especially critical in a pluralistic society where competing worldviews and ideologies challenge traditional Christian teachings. Hermeneutical education helps preachers remain anchored in Scripture while addressing these issues with relevance and clarity.

6.3.3 Equipping Preachers for Doctrinal Integrity

Theological controversies and doctrinal errors often arise from a failure to interpret Scripture accurately. Hermeneutical education safeguards against these errors, equipping preachers to engage responsibly with complex passages and theological debates. For instance, understanding the covenantal framework of the Old and New Testaments helps prevent misinterpretations that contrast grace with law or create artificial divisions within the biblical narrative (Vaughn, 2019).

Preachers who are well-versed in hermeneutics are better prepared to address challenges to orthodoxy, such as the rise of prosperity theology or relativistic interpretations of morality. By grounding their sermons in sound interpretation, they uphold doctrinal integrity and strengthen the faith of their congregations. Moreover, hermeneutical training fosters intellectual humility, encouraging preachers to engage with differing interpretations and recognise their understanding's limitations while remaining committed to biblical truth.

6.3.4 Integration of Hermeneutics in Ministerial Training

To maximise the impact of hermeneutical education, it must be integrated into the broader framework of ministerial training (Hendley, 2024). Seminaries and theological schools play a critical role in equipping preachers with foundational hermeneutical skills, but churches should also invest in ongoing training for their leaders. Workshops, seminars, and study groups focused on biblical interpretation provide opportunities for preachers to deepen their knowledge and refine their methods.

Additionally, collaboration with peers and mentors enhances hermeneutical proficiency. Engaging in group exegesis or seeking sermon preparation feedback fosters a shared learning and accountability culture. These practices not only improve the quality of preaching but also reinforce the importance of hermeneutics as a lifelong discipline within the ministry.

6.4 Practical Strategies for Maintaining Integrity in Preaching

6.4.1 Commitment to Sound Exegesis

Maintaining integrity in preaching begins with a commitment to sound exegesis. Preachers must prioritise a disciplined approach to studying Scripture, dedicating time to understand the text's historical, cultural, and literary contexts. This includes consulting trusted commentaries, lexicons, and theological resources to uncover the nuances of each passage (Sommers, 2007). For example, preparing a sermon on Romans 12:1-2 requires exploring the theological significance of "living sacrifice" within the broader Pauline context and its implications for Christian discipleship.

Sound exegesis also involves engaging with difficult passages rather than avoiding them. Preachers must address texts that challenge popular opinions or expose uncomfortable truths, trusting that the entirety of Scripture is beneficial for teaching, rebuking, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). By handling God's Word with care and respect, preachers model integrity and foster trust within their congregations.

6.4.2 Avoiding Personal Agendas and Biases

Preaching with integrity requires preachers to set aside personal agendas and biases that may distort the message of Scripture (Rezaei, 2001). While it is natural for

preachers to hold opinions and convictions, these must not overshadow the primary goal of faithfully communicating God's Word. For instance, a sermon on generosity should focus on biblical principles rather than seeking to manipulate congregants into financial giving to meet institutional goals.

To guard against this temptation, preachers should cultivate a posture of humility and dependence on the Holy Spirit. Prayerful preparation helps ensure that their sermons are guided by God's wisdom rather than personal ambition. Additionally, seeking feedback from trusted mentors or peers provides accountability and helps identify blind spots that may influence their preaching.

6.4.3 Balancing Exposition and Application

Integrity in preaching requires a balance of exposition and application (Sutherland, 2022). Expository preaching explains the text's meaning, but it also needs to address its practical implications for congregants' lives. Preachers should connect theological truths from Scripture to daily experiences, showing how God's Word influences relationships, decisions, and spiritual growth.

For instance, a sermon on Ephesians 4:29 could explain Paul's call to use uplifting words and then provide practical examples of how this can improve workplace dynamics, family interactions, and social media behaviour. This approach ensures sermons are biblically grounded and relevant, encouraging congregants to live out their faith intentionally.

6.4.4 Cultivating a Spirit of Accountability

Accountability is a vital component of maintaining integrity in preaching. Preachers should seek regular feedback from elders, ministry teams, or peer groups to evaluate their sermons' theological soundness and practical effectiveness. This collaborative approach not only enhances the quality of preaching but also fosters a culture of mutual growth and learning within the church.

Also, preachers should engage with their congregations, inviting questions and encouraging dialogue about the sermons. This interaction creates opportunities for clarification, detailed exploration, and shared reflection on applying biblical truths. A transparent and interactive approach to preaching builds trust and demonstrates the preacher's commitment to serving the congregation's spiritual needs.

6.4.5 Pursuing Continuous Growth and Development

Integrity in preaching requires a commitment to lifelong learning and spiritual growth. Preachers must remain students of Scripture, continually seeking to expand their theological knowledge and refine their skills (Stevenson, 2009). Attending conferences, reading theological works, and participating in study groups are practical ways to stay informed and inspired. Personal spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, meditation, and worship, are equally important for maintaining integrity. A preacher's relationship with God directly impacts their ability to communicate His Word effectively. By prioritising their own spiritual health, preachers model the authentic and faithful discipleship they seek to inspire in their congregations.

6.5 Conclusion

Upholding theological integrity ensures that both doctrine and practice align with biblical truths, fostering unity and faithfulness within the church. Ethical responsibilities of preachers emphasise the importance of integrity, humility, and transparency in ministry, requiring leaders to handle Scripture while modelling Christlike behaviour faithfully. Hermeneutical education equips preachers with the skills to interpret Scripture accurately, bridging the historical context of the Bible with contemporary application. Finally, practical strategies for maintaining preaching integrity include sound exegesis, accountability, and balancing exposition with application, ensuring that sermons are both biblically grounded and relevant to congregational needs. Together, these components create a foundation for effective and faithful preaching ministry.

CHAPTER VII – CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study highlights the need for theological integrity in preaching to uphold the authenticity and transformative power of the gospel. It identifies selective verse usage as a common problem that distorts doctrine, hampers spiritual growth, and threatens congregational unity. Such issues often arise from cognitive biases or social pressures, leading to sermons prioritising human agendas over divine truth. When preaching lacks theological coherence, it erodes trust in the pulpit and weakens the church's spiritual vitality.

In contrast, hermeneutical rigour and theological accountability strengthen preaching integrity and promote spiritual maturity. Emphasising expository preaching allows for a balanced presentation of God's Word, integrating doctrinal truth with practical application. This ensures that sermons inform and transform, helping believers live out their faith in various contexts.

7.2 Implications for Preaching Practices

The findings stress the importance of grounding sermons in Scripture rather than personal opinions or cultural trends. Preachers should employ sound hermeneutics, which includes careful exegesis and contextual awareness. Ethical preaching requires a commitment to God's unaltered truth, even on sensitive topics. Moreover, thoughtful engagement with congregations is crucial for fostering theological literacy and critical thinking. Preaching should encourage believers to wrestle with Scripture and seek

deeper understanding, creating an environment conducive to spiritual growth. As digital media and cultural narratives evolve, preachers must balance relevance and doctrinal fidelity, ensuring sermons remain accessible yet theologically deep.

7.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies could explore the psychological and sociological factors affecting preaching, such as cognitive biases and leadership pressures. Longitudinal research on the effects of selective preaching on congregational trust and spiritual growth would provide valuable insights. Additionally, examining the impact of technology on sermon preparation in diverse contexts warrants further investigation. Comparative studies across denominations could enhance understanding of how different traditions manage faithfulness to Scripture alongside contextual relevance.

7.4 Final Reflections

Preaching significantly shapes the spiritual lives of individuals and communities. This study highlights the preacher's responsibility to faithfully proclaim God's Word in a transformative manner. Upholding theological integrity in preaching is essential for the health and unity of the church. By adopting ethical practices, robust hermeneutical education, and strong accountability, preachers can rebuild trust in the pulpit and encourage congregations to engage with Scripture. Focusing on expository preaching and spiritual formation ensures the church remains rooted in the gospel while effectively addressing contemporary challenges. As the church faces a complex cultural landscape, preachers must maintain the transformative power of Scripture, equipping believers to live faithfully and act as witnesses to God's redemptive work.

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Colossians 2:13-14

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1 Corinthians 12:12-14

1 Corinthians 12:27

2 Corinthians 1:10

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

2 Corinthians 5:21

Deuteronomy 24:16

Ephesians 2:8-9

Ephesians 2:10

Ephesians 4:3-6

Ephesians 4:4-6

Ephesians 4:22-24

Ephesians 5:23

Galatians 2:16

Galatians 3:28

Galatians 5:6

Hebrews 10:10

Isaiah 1:17

Isaiah 41:9

Isaiah 46:11 *James Moffatt Version*

James 2:17

James 2:18-26

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